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THE MAN WHO SAW
THROUGH HEAVEN



BOOKS BY
WILBUR DANIEL STEELE



THE MAN WHO
SAW THROUGH HEAVEN

URKEY ISLAND

TABOO

THE TERRIBLE WOMAN

ISLES OF THE BLEST

THE SHAME DANCE

LAND'S END

STORM



813
St32m

THE MAN WHO
SAW THROUGH HEAVEN
AND OTHER STORIES

BY

WILBUR DANIEL STEELE



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SAW THROUGH HEAVEN
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THE MAN WHO SAW
THROUGH HEAVEN



I
THE MAN WHO
SAW THROUGH HEAVEN

PEOPLE have wondered (there being obviously no question of romance involved) how I could ever have allowed myself to be let in for the East African adventure of Mrs. Diana in search of her husband. There were several reasons. To begin with, the time and effort and money weren't mine; they were the property of the wheel of which I was but a cog, the Society through which Diana's life had been insured, along with the rest of that job lot of missionaries. The "letting in" was the firm's. In the second place, the wonderers have not counted on Mrs. Diana's capacity for getting things done for her. Meek and helpless. Yes, but God was on her side. Too meek, too helpless to move mountains herself, if those who happened to be handy didn't move them for her then her God would know the reason why. Having dedicated her all to making straight the Way, why should her neighbor cavil at giving a little? The writer for one, a colonial governor-general for another, railway magnates, insurance managers, *safari* leaders, the ostrich farmer of Ndua, all these and a dozen others in their turns have felt the hundred-ton weight of her thin-lipped meek-

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ness—have seen her in metaphor sitting grimly on the doorsteps of their souls.

A third reason lay in my own troubled conscience. Though I did it in innocence, I can never forget that it was I who personally conducted Diana's party to the Observatory on that fatal night in Boston before it sailed. Had it not been for that kindly intentioned "hunch" of mine, the astounded eye of the Reverend Hubert Diana would never have gazed through the floor of Heaven, and he would never have undertaken to measure the Infinite with the foot rule of his mind.

It all started so simply. My boss at the shipping-and-insurance office gave me the word in the morning. "Bunch of missionaries for the *Platonic* to-morrow. They're on our hands in a way. Show 'em the town." It wasn't so easy when you think of it: one male and seven females on their way to the heathen; though it was easier in Boston than it might have been in some other towns. The evening looked the simplest. My friend Krum was at the Observatory that semester; there at least I was sure their sensibilities would come to no harm.

On the way out in the street car, seated opposite to Diana and having to make conversation, I talked of Krum and of what I knew of his work with the spiral nebulæ. Having to appear to listen, Diana did so (as all day long) with a vaguely indulgent smile. He really hadn't time for me. That night his life was exalted as it had never been, and would perhaps never

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be again. Tomorrow's sailing, the actual fact of leaving all to follow Him, held his imagination in thrall. Moreover, he was a bridegroom of three days with his bride beside him, his nerves at once assuaged and thrilled. No, but more. As if a bride were not enough, arrived in Boston, he had found himself surrounded by a very galaxy of womanhood gathered from the four corners; already within hours one felt the chaste tentacles of their feminine dependence curling about the party's unique man; already their contacts with the world of their new lives began to be made through him; already they saw in part through his eyes. I wonder what he would have said if I had told him he was a little drunk.

In the course of the day I think I had got him fairly well. As concerned his Church he was at once an asset and a liability. He believed its dogma as few still did, with a simplicity, "the old-time religion." He was born that kind. Of the stuff of the fanatic, the reason he was not a fanatic was that, curiously impervious to little questionings, he had never been aware that his faith was anywhere attacked. A self-educated man, he had accepted the necessary smattering facts of science with a serene indulgence, as simply so much further proof of what the Creator could do when He put His Hand to it. Nor was he conscious of any conflict between these facts and the fact that there existed a substantial Heaven, geographically up, and a substantial Hot Place, geographically down.

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So, for his Church, he was an asset in these days. And so, and for the same reason, he was a liability. The Church must after all keep abreast of the times. For home consumption, with modern congregations, especially urban ones, a certain streak of "healthy" skepticism is no longer amiss in the pulpit; it makes people who read at all more comfortable in their pews. A man like Hubert Diana is more for the cause than a hundred. But what to do with him? Well, such things arrange themselves. There's the Foreign Field. The blacker the heathen the whiter the light they'll want, and the solider the conception of a God the Father enthroned in a Heaven of which the sky above them is the visible floor.

And that, at bottom, was what Hubert Diana believed. Accept as he would with the top of his brain the fact of a spherical earth zooming through space, deep in his heart he knew that the world lay flat from modern Illinois to ancient Palestine, and that the sky above it, blue by day and by night festooned with guiding stars for wise men, was the nether side of a floor on which the resurrected trod.

I shall never forget the expression of his face when he realized he was looking straight through it that night. In the quiet dark of the dome I saw him remove his eye from the eyepiece of the telescope up there on the staging and turn it, in the ray of a hooded bulb, on the demon's keeper, Krum.

"What's that, Mr. Krum? I didn't get you!"

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"I say, that particular cluster you're looking at——"

"This star, you mean?"

"You'd have to count awhile to count the stars describing their orbits in that 'star,' Mr. Diana. But what I was saying—have you ever had the wish I used to have as a boy—that you could actually look back into the past? With your own two eyes?"

Diana spoke slowly. He didn't know it, but it had already begun to happen; he was already caught. "I have often wished, Mr. Krum, that I might actually look back into the time of our Lord. Actually. Yes."

Krum grunted. He was young. "We'd have to pick a nearer neighbor than *Messier 79* then. The event you see when you put your eye to that lens is happening much too far in the past. The light-waves thrown off by that particular cluster on the day, say, of the Crucifixion—you won't live to see them. They've hardly started yet—a mere twenty centuries on their way—leaving them something like eight hundred and thirty centuries yet to come before they reach the earth."

Diana laughed the queerest catch of a laugh. "And—and there—there won't be any earth here, then, to welcome them."

"*What?*" It was Krum's turn to look startled. So for a moment the two faces remained in confrontation, the one, as I say, startled, the other exuding visibly

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little sea-green globules of sweat. It was Diana that caved in first, his voice hardly louder than a whisper.

"W-w-will there?"

None of us suspected the enormousness of the thing that had happened in Diana's brain. Krum shrugged his shoulders and snapped his fingers. Deliberately. *Snap!* "What's a thousand centuries or so in the cosmic reckoning?" He chuckled. "We're just beginning to get out among 'em with *Messier*, you know. In the print room, Mr. Diana, I can show you photographs of clusters to which, if you cared to go, traveling at the speed of light ——"


The voice ran on; but Diana's eye had gone back to the eyepiece, and his affrighted soul had re-entered the big black tube sticking its snout out of the slit in the iron hemisphere. . . . "At the speed of light!" . . . That unsuspected, that wildly chance-found chink in the armor of his philosophy! The body is resurrected and it ascends to Heaven instantaneously. At what speed must it be borne to reach instantaneously that city beyond the ceiling of the sky? At a speed inconceivable, mystical. At, say (as he had often said to himself), *the speed of light*. . . . And now, hunched there in the trap that had caught him, black rods, infernal levers and wheels, he was aware of his own eye passing vividly through unpartitioned emptiness, *eight hundred and fifty centuries at the speed of light!*

"And still beyond these," Krum was heard, "we be-

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gin to come into the regions of the spiral nebulæ. We've some interesting photographs in the print room, if you've the time."

The ladies below were tired of waiting. One had "lots of packing to do." The bride said, "Yes, I do think we should be getting along, Hubert, dear; if you're ready ——"

The fellow actually jumped. It's lucky he didn't break anything. His face looked greener and dewier than ever amid the contraptions above. "If you—you and the ladies, Cora—wouldn't mind—if Mr.—Mr.—(he'd mislaid my name) would see you back to the hotel ——" Meeting silence, he began to expostulate. "I feel that this is a rich experience. I'll follow shortly; I know the way." 

In the car going back into the city Mrs. Diana set at rest the flutterings of six hearts. Being unmarried, they couldn't understand men as she did. When I think of that face of hers, to which I was destined to grow only too accustomed in the weary, itchy days of the trek into Kavirondoland, with its slightly tilted nose, its irregular pigmentation, its easily inflamed lids, and long moist cheeks, like those of a hunting dog, glorying in weariness, it seems incredible that a light of coyness could have found lodgment there. But that night it did. She sat serene among her virgins.

"You don't know Bert. You wait; he'll get a perfectly wonderful sermon out of all that to-night, Bert will."

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Krum was having a grand time with his neophyte. He would have stayed up all night. Immured in the little print room crowded with files and redolent of acids, he conducted his disciple "glassy-eyed" through the dim frontiers of space, holding before him one after another the likenesses of universes sister to our own, islanded in immeasurable vacancy, curled like glimmering crullers on their private Milky Ways, and hiding in their wombs their myriad "coal-pockets," star-dust foetuses of which—their quadrillion years accomplished—their litters of new suns would be born, to bear their planets, to bear their moons in turn.

"And beyond these?"

Always, after each new feat of distance, it was the same. "And beyond?" Given an ell, Diana surrendered to a pop-eyed lust for nothing less than light-years. "And still beyond?"

"Who knows?"

"The mind quits. For if there's no end to these nebulae ——"

"But supposing there is?"

"An end? But, Mr. Krum, in the very idea of an ending ——"

"And end to what we might call this particular category of magnitudes. Eh?"

"I don't get that."

"Well, take this—take the opal in your ring there. The numbers and distances inside that stone may con-

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ceivably be to themselves as staggering as ours to us in our own system. Come! that's not so far-fetched. What are we learning about the structure of the atom? A nucleus (call it a sun) revolved about in eternal orbits by electrons (call them planets, worlds). Infinitesimal; but after all what are bigness and littleness but matters of comparison? To eyes on one of those electrons (don't be too sure there aren't any) its tutelary sun may flame its way across a heaven a comparative ninety million miles away. Impossible for them to conceive of a boundary to their billions of atomic systems, molecular universes. In that category of magnitudes its diameter is infinity; once it has made the leap into our category and become an opal it is merely a quarter of an inch. That's right, Mr. Diana, you may well stare at it: between *now* and *now* ten thousand histories may have come and gone down there. . . . And just so the diameter of our own cluster of universes, going over into another category, may be ——"

"May be a—a ring—a little stone—in a—a—a—ring."

Krum was tickled by the way the man's imagination jumped and engulfed it.

"Why not? That's as good a guess as the next. A ring, let's say, worn carelessly on the—well, say the tentacle—of some vast organism—some inchoate creature hobnobbing with its cloudy kind in another system of universes—which in turn ——"

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It is curious that none of them realized next day that they were dealing with a stranger, a changed man. Why he carried on, why he capped that night of cosmic debauch by shaving, eating an unremarkable breakfast, packing his terrestrial toothbrush and collars, and going up the gangplank in tow of his excited convoy to sail away, is beyond explanation—unless it was simply that he was in a daze.

It wasn't until four years later that I was allowed to know what had happened on that ship, and even then the tale was so disjointed, warped, and opinionated, so darkly seen in the mirror of Mrs. Diana's orthodoxy, that I had almost to guess what it was *really* all about.

"When Hubert turned irreligious . . ." That phrase, recurrent on her tongue in the meanderings of the East African quest to which we were by then committed, will serve to measure her understanding. Irreligious! Good Lord! But from that sort of thing I had to reconstruct the drama. Evening after evening beside her camp fire (appended to the Mineral Survey Expedition Toward Uganda through the kindness—actually the worn-down surrender—of the Protectorate government) I lingered a while before joining the merrier engineers, watched with fascination the bumps growing under the mosquitoes on her forehead, and listened to the jargon of her mortified meekness and her scandalized faith.

There had been a fatal circumstance, it seems, at

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the very outset. If Diana could but have been seasick, as the rest of them were (horribly), all might still have been well. In the misery of desired death, along with the other contents of a heaving midriff, he might have brought up the assorted universes of which he had been led too rashly to partake. But he wasn't. As if his wife's theory was right, as if Satan was looking out for him, he was spared to prowling the swooping decks immune. Four days and nights alone. Time enough to digest and assimilate into his being beyond remedy that lump of whirling magnitudes and to feel himself surrendering with a strange new ecstasy to the drunkenness of liberty.

Such liberty! Given Diana's type, it is hard to imagine it adequately. The abrupt, complete removal of the toils of reward and punishment; the withdrawal of the surveillance of an all-seeing, all-knowing Eye; the windy assurance of being responsible for nothing, important to no one, no longer (as the police say) "wanted"! It must have been beautiful in those few days of its first purity, before it began to be discolored by his contemptuous pity for others, the mask of his inevitable loneliness and his growing fright.

The first any of them knew of it—even his wife—was in mid-voyage, the day the sea went down and the seven who had been sick came up. There seemed an especial Providence in the calming of the waters; it was Sunday morning and Diana had been asked to conduct the services.

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He preached on the text: "For of such is the kingdom of Heaven."

"If our concept of God means anything it means a God *all*-mighty, Creator of *all* that exists, Director of the *infinite*, cherishing in His Heaven the saved souls of *all space and all time*."

Of course; amen. And wasn't it nice to feel like humans again, and real sunshine pouring up through the lounge ports from an ocean suddenly grown kind? . . . But—then—*what* was Diana *saying*?

Mrs. Diana couldn't tell about it coherently even after a lapse of fifty months. Even in a setting as remote from that steamer's lounge as the equatorial bush, the ember-reddened canopy of thorn trees, the meandering camp fires, the chant and tramp somewhere away of Kikuyu porters dancing in honor of an especial largesse of fat zebra meat—even here her memory of that impious outburst was too vivid, too aghast.

"It was Hubert's look! The way he stared at us! As if you'd said he was licking his chops! . . . That '*Heaven*' of his!"

It seems they hadn't waked up to what he was about until he had the dimensions of his sardonic Paradise irreparably drawn in. The final haven of all right souls. Not alone the souls released from this our own tiny earth. In the millions of solar systems we see as stars how many millions of satellites must there be upon which at some time in their histories conditions suited to organic life subsist? Uncounted hordes of

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wheeling populations! Of men? God's creatures at all events, a portion of them reasoning. Weirdly shaped perhaps, but what of that? And that's only to speak of our own inconsiderable cluster of universes. That's to say nothing of other systems of magnitudes, where God's creatures are to our world what we are to the worlds in the atoms in our finger rings. (He had shaken *his*, here, in their astounded faces.) And all these, all the generations of these enormous and microscopic beings harvested through a time beside which the life span of our earth is as a second in a million centuries: all these brought to rest for an eternity to which time itself is a watch tick—all crowded to rest pellmell, thronged, serried, packed, packed to suffocation in layers unnumbered light-years deep. This must needs be our concept of Heaven if God is the God of the Whole. If, on the other hand ———

The other hand was the hand of the second officer, the captain's delegate at divine worship that Sabbath day. He at last had "come to."

I don't know whether it was the same day or the next; Mrs. Diana was too vague. But here's the picture. Seven women huddled in the large stateroom on B-deck, conferring in whispers, aghast, searching one another's eye obliquely even as they bowed their heads in prayer for some light—and of a sudden the putting back of the door and the in-marching of the Reverend Hubert . . .

As Mrs. Diana tried to tell me, "You understand,

don't you, he had just taken a bath? And he hadn't—he had forgotten to ——”

Adam-innocent there he stood. Not a stitch. But I don't believe for a minute it was a matter of forgetting. In the high intoxication of his soul release, already crossed (by the second officer) and beginning to show his zealot claws, he needed some gesture stunning enough to witness to his separation, his unique rightness, his contempt of match-flare civilizations and infinitesimal taboos.

But I can imagine that stateroom scene: the gasps, the heads colliding in aversion, and Diana's six weedy feet of birthday suit towering in the shadows, and ready to sink through the deck I'll warrant, now the act was irrevocable, but still grimly carrying it off.

“And if, on the other hand, you ask me to bow down before a God peculiar to this one earth, this one grain of dust lost among the giants of space, watching its sparrows fall, profoundly interested in a speck called Palestine no bigger than the quadrillionth part of one of the atoms in the ring here on my finger ——”

Really scared by this time, one of the virgins shrieked. It was altogether too close quarters with a madman.

Mad? Of course there was the presumption: “Crazy as a loon.” Even legally it was so adjudged at the *Platonic's* first port of call, Algiers, where, when Diana escaped ashore and wouldn't come back again, he had to be given over to the workings of the French

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Law. I talked with the magistrate myself some forty months later, when, "let in" for the business as I have told, I stopped there on my way out.

"But what would you?" were his words. "We must live in the world as the world lives, is it not? Sanity? Sanity is what? Is it, for example, an intellectual clarity, a balanced perception of the realities? Naturally, speaking out of court, your friend was of a sanity—of a sanity, sir ——" Here the magistrate made with thumb and fingers the gesture only the French can make for a thing that is matchless, a beauty, a transcendent instance of any kind. He himself was Gallic, rational. Then, with a lift of shoulder: "But what would you? We must live in the world that seems."

Diana, impounded in Algiers for deportation, escaped. What after all are the locks and keys of this pinchbeck category of magnitudes? More remarkable still, there in Arab Africa, he succeeded in vanishing from the knowledge and pursuit of men. And of women. His bride, now that their particular mission had fallen through, was left to decide whether to return to America or to go on with two of the company, the Misses Brookhart and Smutts, who were bound for a school in Smyrna. In the end she followed the latter course. It was there, nearly four years later, that I was sent to join her by an exasperated and worn-out Firm.

By that time she knew again where her husband-

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errant was—or where at least, from time to time in his starry dartings over this our mote of dust, he had been heard of, spoken to, seen.

Could we but have a written history of those years of his apostolic vagabondage, a record of the towns in which he was jailed or from which he was kicked out, of the ports in which he starved, of the ships on which he stowed away, presently to reveal himself in proselyting ardor, denouncing the earthlings, the fatelings, the dupes of bugaboo, meeting scoff with scoff, preaching the new revelation red-eyed, like an angry prophet. Or was it, more simply, like a man afraid?

Was that the secret, after all, of his prodigious restlessness? Had it anything in common with the swarming of those pale worms that flee the Eye of the Infinite around the curves of the stone you pick up in a field? Talk of the man without a country! What of the man without a universe?

It is curious that I never suspected his soul's dilemma until I saw the first of his mud-sculptures in the native village of Ndua in the province of Kasuma in British East. Here it was, our objective attained, we parted company with the government *safari* and shifted the burden of Way-straightening to the shoulders of Major Wyese, the ostrich farmer of the neighborhood.

While still on the *safari* I had put to Mrs. Diana a question that had bothered me: "Why on earth should your husband ever have chosen this particular

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neck of the woods to land up in? Why Kavirondoland?"

"It was here we were coming at the time Hubert turned irreligious, to found a mission. It's a coincidence, isn't it?"

And yet I would have sworn Diana hadn't a sense of humor about him anywhere. But perhaps it *wasn't* an ironic act. Perhaps it was simply that, giving up the struggle with a society blinded by "a little learning" and casting about for a virgin field, he had remembered this.

"I supposed he was a missionary," Major Wyeseide told us with a flavor of indignation. "I went on that. I let him live here—six or seven months of it—while he was learning the tongue. I was a bit nonplused, to put it mildly, when I discovered what he was up to."

What things Diana had been up to the Major showed us in one of the huts in the native kraal—a round dozen of them, modeled in mud and baked. Blackened blobs of mud, that's all. Likenesses of nothing under the sun, fortuitous masses sprouting haphazard tentacles, only two among them showing postules that might have been experimental heads. . . . The ostrich farmer saw our faces.

"Rum, eh? Of course I realized the chap was anything but fit. A walking skeleton. Nevertheless, whatever it is about these beasties, there's not a nigger in the village has dared set foot inside this hut since Diana left. You can see for yourselves it's about to

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crash. There's another like it he left at Suki, above here. Taboo, no end!"

So Diana's "hunch" had been right. He had found his virgin field indeed, fit soil for his cosmic fright. A religion in the making, here before our eyes.

"This was at the very last before he left," Wyese explained. "He took to making these mud pies quite of a sudden; the whole lot within a fortnight's time. Before that he had simply talked, harangued. He would sit here in the doorway of an evening with the niggers squatted around and harangue 'em by the hour. I knew something of it through my house-boys. The most amazing rot. All about the stars to begin with, as if these black baboons could half grasp *astronomy*! But that seemed all proper. Then there was talk about a something a hundred times as big and powerful as the world, sun, moon, and stars put together—some perfectly enormous stupendous awful being—but knowing how mixed the boys can get, it still seemed all regular—simply the parson's way of getting at the notion of an Almighty God. But no, they insisted, there wasn't any God. That's the point, they said; there *is no* God. . . . Well, that impressed me as a go. That's when I decided to come down and get the rights of this star-swallowing monstrosity the beggar was feeding my labor on. And here he sat in the doorway with one of these beasties—here it is, this one—waving it furiously in the niggers' benighted faces. And do you know what he'd done?—you can see the

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mark here still on this wobble-leg, this tentacle-business—he had taken off a ring he had and screwed it on just here. His finger ring, my word of honor! And still, if you'll believe it, I didn't realize he was just daft. Not until he spoke to me. 'I find,' he was good enough to enlighten me, 'I find I have to make it somehow concrete.' . . . 'Make what?' . . . 'Our wearer.' 'Our *what, where?*' . . . 'In the following category.' . . . His actual words, honor bright. I was going to have him sent down-country where he could be looked after. He got ahead of me though. He cleared out. When I heard he'd turned up at Suki I ought, I suppose, to have attended to it. But I was having trouble with leopards. And you know how things go."

From there we went to Suki, the Major accompanying. It was as like Ndua as one flea to its brother, a stockade inclosing round houses of mud, wattles, and thatch, and full of naked heathen. The Kavirondo are the nakedest of all African peoples and, it is said, the most moral. It put a great strain on Mrs. Diana; all that whole difficult anxious time, as it were detachedly, I could see her itching to get them into Mother Hubbards and cast-off Iowa pants.

Here too, as the Major had promised, we found a holy of holies, rather a dreadful of dreadfuls, "taboo no end," its shadows cluttered with the hurlothrumbos of Diana's artistry. What puzzled me was their number. Why this appetite for experimentation? There was an uncertainty; one would think its effect on po-

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tential converts would be bad. Here, as in Ndua, Diana had contented himself at first with words and skyward gesticulations. Not for so long however. Feeling the need of giving his concept of the cosmic "wearer" a substance much earlier, he had shut himself in with the work, literally—a fever of creation. We counted seventeen of the nameless "blobs," all done, we were told, in the seven days and nights before their maker had again cleared out. The villagers would hardly speak of him; only after spitting to protect themselves, their eyes averted, and in an undertone, would they mention him: "He of the Ring." Thereafter we were to hear of him only as "He of the Ring."

Leaving Suki, Major Wyese turned us over (thankfully, I warrant) to a native who told us his name was Charlie Kamba. He had spent some years in Nairobi, running for an Indian outfitter, and spoke English remarkably well. It was from him we learned, quite casually, when our modest eight-load *safari* was some miles on its way, that the primary object of our coming was nonexistent. Hubert Diana was dead.

Dead nearly five weeks—a moon and a little—and buried in the mission church at Tara Hill.

Mission church! There was a poser for us. *Mission church?*

Well then, Charlie Kamba gave us to know that he was paraphrasing in a large way suitable to our habits

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of thought. We wouldn't have understood *his* informant's "wizard house" or "house of the effigy."

I will say for Mrs. Diana that in the course of our halt of lugubrious amazement she shed tears. That some of them were not tears of unrealized relief it would be hardly natural to believe. She had desired loyally to find her husband, but when she should have found him—what? This problem, sturdily ignored so long, was now removed.

Turn back? Never! Now it would seem the necessity for pressing forward was doubled. In the scrub-fringed ravine of our halt the porters resumed their loads, the dust stood up again, the same caravan moved on. But how far it was now from being the same.

From that moment it took on, for me at least, a new character. It wasn't the news especially; the fact that Diana was dead had little to do with it. Perhaps it was simply that the new sense of something aimfully and cumulatively dramatic in our progress had to have a beginning, and that moment would do as well as the next.

Six villages: M'nann, Leika, Leikapo, Shamba, Little Tara, and Tara, culminating in the apotheosis of Tara Hill. Six stops for the night on the road it had cost Diana as many months to cover in his singular pilgrimage to his inevitable goal. Or in his flight to it. Yes, his stampede. Now the pipers at that four-day orgy of liberty on the *Platonic's* decks were

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at his heels for their pay. Now that his strength was failing, the hosts of loneliness were after him, creeping out of their dreadful magnitudes, the hounds of space. Over all that ground it seemed to me we were following him not by the word of hearsay but, as one follows a wounded animal making for its earth, by the droppings of his blood.

Our progress had taken on a pattern; it built itself with a dramatic artistry; it gathered suspense. As though it were a story at its most breathless places "continued in our next," and I a reader forgetting the road's weariness, the dust, the torment of insects never escaped, the inadequate food, I found myself hardly able to keep from running on ahead to reach the evening's village, to search out the inevitable repository of images left by the white stranger who had come and tarried there awhile and gone again.

More concrete and ever more concrete. The immemorial compromise with the human hunger for a symbol to see with the eyes, touch with the hands. Hierarchy after hierarchy of little mud effigies—one could see the necessity pushing the man. Out of the protoplasmic blobs of Ndua, Suki, even M'nann, at Leikapo Diana's concept of infinity (so pure in that halcyon epoch at sea), of categories nested within categories like Japanese boxes, of an over-creature wearing our cosmos like a trinket, unawares, had become a mass with legs to stand on and a real head. The shards scattered about in the filth of the hut there

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(as if in violence of despair) were still monstrosities, but with a sudden stride of concession their monstrousness was the monstrousness of lizard and turtle and crocodile. At Shamba there were dozens of huge-footed birds.

It is hard to be sure in retrospect, but I do believe that by the time we reached Little Tara I began to see the thing as a whole—the foetus, working out slowly, blindly, but surely, its evolution in the womb of fright. At Little Tara there was a change in the character of the exhibits; their numbers had diminished, their size had grown. There was a boar with tusks and a bull the size of a dog with horns, and on a tusk and on a horn an indentation left by a ring.

I don't believe Mrs. Diana got the thing at all. Toward the last she wasn't interested in the huts of relics; at Little Tara she wouldn't go near the place; she was "too tired." It must have been pretty awful, when you think of it, even if all she saw in them was the mud-pie play of a man reverted to a child.

There was another thing at Little Tara quite as momentous as the jump to boar and bull. Here at last a mask had been thrown aside. Here there had been no pretense of proselyting, no astronomical lectures, no doorway harangues. Straightway he had arrived (a fabulous figure already, long heralded), he had commandeered a house and shut himself up in it and there, mysterious, assiduous, he had remained three days and nights, eating nothing, but drinking

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gallons of the foul water they left in gourds outside his curtain of reeds. No one in the village had ever seen what he had done and left there. Now, candidly, those labors were for himself alone.

Here at last in Tara the moment of that confession had overtaken the fugitive. It was he, ill with fever and dying of nostalgia—not these naked black baboon men seen now as little more than blurs—who had to give the Beast of the Infinite a name and a shape. And more and more, not only a shape, but a *shapeliness*. From the instant when, no longer able to live alone with nothingness, he had given it a likeness in Ndua mud, and perceived that it was intolerable and fled its face, the turtles and distorted crocodiles of Leikapo and the birds of Shamba had become inevitable, and no less inevitable the Little Tara boar and bull. Another thing grows plain in retrospect: the reason why, done to death (as all the way they reported him) he couldn't die. He didn't dare to. Didn't dare to close his eyes.

It was at Little Tara we first heard of him as "Father Witch," a name come back, we were told, from Tara, where he had gone. I had heard it pronounced several times before it suddenly obtruded from the native context as actually two English words. That was what made it queer. It was something they must have picked up by rote, uncomprehending; something then they could have had from no lips but his own. When I repeated it after them with a better

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accent they pointed up toward the north, saying "Tara! Tara!"—their eagerness mingled with awe.

I shall never forget Tara as we saw it, after our last blistering scramble up a gorge, situated in the clear air on a slope belted with cedars. A mid-African stockade left by some blunder in an honest Colorado landscape, or a newer and bigger Vermont. Here at the top of our journey, black savages, their untidy *shambas*, the very Equator, all these seemed as incongruous as a Gothic cathedral in a Congo marsh. I wonder if Hubert Diana knew whither his instinct was guiding him on the long road of his journey here to die. . . .

He had died and he was buried, not in the village, but about half a mile distant, on the ridge; this we were given to know almost before we had arrived. There was no need to announce ourselves, the word of our coming had outrun us; the populace was at the gates.

"Our Father Witch! Our Father Witch!" They knew what we were after; the funny parrot-wise English stood out from the clack and clatter of their excited speech. "Our Father Witch! Ay! Ay!" With a common eagerness they gesticulated at the hilltop beyond the cedars.

Certainly here was a change. No longer the propitiatory spitting, the averted eyes, the uneasy whispering allusion to him who had passed that way: here

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in Tara they would shout him from the housetops, with a kind of civic pride.

We learned the reason for this on our way up the hill. It was because they were his chosen, the initiate.

We made the ascent immediately, against the village's advice. It was near evening; the return would be in the dark; it was a bad country for goblins; wouldn't tomorrow morning do? . . . No, it wouldn't do the widow. Her face was set. . . . And so, since we were resolved to go, the village went with us, armed with rattles and drums. Charlie Kamba walked beside us, sifting the information a hundred were eager to give.

These people were proud, he said, because their wizard was more powerful than all the wizards of all the other villages "in the everywhere together." If he cared to he could easily knock down all the other villages in the "everywhere," destroying all the people and all the cattle. If he cared to he could open his mouth and swallow the sky and the stars. But Tara he had chosen. Tara he would protect. He made their mealies to grow and their cattle to multiply.

I protested, "But he is *dead* now!"

Charlie Kamba made signs of deprecation. I discerned that he was far from being clear about the thing himself.

Yes, he temporized, this Father Witch was dead,

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quite dead. On the other hand he was up there. On the other hand he would never die. He was longer than forever. Yes, quite true, he was dead and buried under the pot.

I gave it up. "How did he die?"

Well, he came to this village of Tara very suffering, very sick. The dead man who walked. His face was very sad. Very eaten. Very frightened. He came to this hill. So he lived here for two full moons, very hot, very eaten, very dead. These men made him a house as he commanded them, also a stockade. In the house he was very quiet, very dead, making magic two full moons. Then he came out and they that were waiting saw him. He had made the magic, and the magic had made him well. His face was kind. He was happy. He was full fed. He was full fed, these men said, without any eating. Yes, they carried up to him very fine food, because they were full of wonder and some fear, but he did not eat any of it. Some water he drank. So, for two days and the night between them, he continued sitting in the gate of the stockade, very happy, very full fed. He told these people very much about their wizard, who is bigger than everywhere and longer than forever and can, if he cares to, swallow the sky and stars. From time to time however, ceasing to talk to these people, he got to his knees and talked in his own strange tongue to Our Father Witch, his eyes held shut. When he had done this just at sunset of

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the second day he fell forward on his face. So he remained that night. The next day these men took him into the house and buried him under the pot. On the other hand Our Father Witch is longer than forever. He remains there still. . . .

The first thing I saw in the hut's interior was the earthen pot at the northern end, wrong-side-up on the ground. I was glad I had preceded Mrs. Diana. I walked across and sat down on it carelessly, hoping so that her afflicted curiosity might be led astray. It gave me the oddest feeling, though, to think of what was there beneath my nonchalant sitting-portion—aware as I was of the Kavirondo burial of a great man—up to the neck in mother earth, and the rest of him left out in the dark of the pot for the undertakings of the ants. I hoped his widow wouldn't wonder about that inverted vessel of clay.

I needn't have worried. Her attention was arrested otherwheres. I shall not forget the look of her face, caught above me in the red shaft of sundown entering the western door, as she gazed at the last and the largest of the Reverend Hubert Diana's gods. That long, long cheek of hers, buffeted by sorrow, startled now and mortified. Not till that moment, I believe, had she comprehended the steps of mud-images she had been following for what they were, the steps of idolatry.

For my part, I wasn't startled. Even before we started up the hill, knowing that her husband had

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dared to die here, I could have told her pretty much what she would find.

This overlord of the cosmic categories that he had fashioned (at last) in his own image sat at the other end of the red-streaked house upon a bench—a throne?—of mud. Diana had been no artist. An ovoid two-eyed head, a cylindrical trunk, two arms, two legs, that's all. But indubitably man, man-size. Only one finger of one of the hands had been done with much care. It wore an opal, a two-dollar stone from Mexico, set in a silver ring. This was the hand that was lifted, and over it the head was bent.

I've said Diana was no artist. I'll take back the words. The figure was crudeness itself, but in the relation between that bent head and that lifted hand there was something which was something else. A sense of scrutiny one would have said no genius of mud could ever have conveyed. An attitude of interest centered in that bauble, intense and static, breathless and eternal all in one—penetrating to its bottom atom, to the last electron, to a hill upon it, and to a two-legged mite about to die. Marking (yes, I'll swear to the incredible) the sparrow's fall.

The magic was made. The road that had commenced with the blobs of Ndua—the same that commenced with our hairy ancestors listening to the night-wind in their caves—was run.

And from here Diana, of a sudden happy, of a sudden looked after, "full fed," had walked out——

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But no; I couldn't stand that mortified sorrow on the widow's face any longer. She had to be made to see what she wanted to see. I said it aloud:

"From here, Mrs. Diana, your husband walked out ——"

"He had sunk to idolatry. *Idolatry!*"

"To the bottom, yes. And come up its whole history again. And from here he walked out into the sunshine to kneel and talk with 'Our Father Which ——' "

She got it. She caught it. I wish you could have seen the light going up those long, long cheeks as she got it:

"Our Father which art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name!"

We went down hill in the darkness, protected against goblins by a vast rattling of gourds and beating of goat-hide drums.

S O O T H

S O O T H

THERE was no road to follow, not even a wheel track; the rise and fall of the ground, matted inches deep in wild cranberry, gave to the car the feel of a boat rushing over the swells of a hidden sea. Her hands loose on the wheel and her dilated eyes fixed on the boiling column of the headlights, Mathilda let it run free through the moon-struck mists lying on the island moor.

She was just turned twenty. The man beside her was in the thirties. It was his car. Moreover it was his neck. But this was not what bothered Erd. "What can the child be thinking of, in that head of hers?" This was the question that ragged him and made him feel awkward and futile.

What Mathilda was thinking was: "That stuff Roy Glaze is carrying to-night is pallid. I couldn't get a kick out of a quart. I can't get a kick out of anything, though, any more. . . . Step on it, girl! A little speed! If we hit a fence, good night!"

Erd leaned nearer. "You won't get back to the club in time for the fox trot, Tilly."

She lifted her bare shoulders, shook her cropped hair in the wind of their flight, and gave the car more gas.

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In a hollow full of white blindness there was a sudden hail of brush whipping the mudguards.

"'Bout far enough, Tilly."

"Yellow!"

The invisible ground sloped sharply upward. As the girl brought all her weight on the accelerator and the engine roared in answer, Erd leaned forward, found the ignition switch in the dark, and snapped it off. He pulled the brake lever back as the car came to a standstill; then he lighted a cigarette, the match shaking a little in his hand.

Her eyes narrowed. "Say, where do you get that? 'Fraid of your bus? Dad'll buy you a new one. You dead man! You poor *corpse!*'"

Erd flushed. The insult was not in the words; it was in the fact that, of a generation still in the full of youth, he should be made to seem middle-aged and prudent hearted by this child. Opening the door he stepped out and nodded ahead. "Come look."

"Not with you!"

Scrambling out the other side she ran. As she ran the grass and huckleberry tangle drenched her to the knees and sent fine waves of chill up her body. The lines about her mouth softened and vanished, her lips parted, she held her arms out, palms up, and lifting her chin she gave the length of her throat to the impact of the particles of the mist.

"Not on your life!" she cried when the man, over-

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taking her, caught at her wrist. "You let me go, or I'll—I'll ——"

He released her only when she stopped struggling and looked around.

"If you want to know where we were bound, Tilly, see there."

From the top of the rise to which their little dash had brought them the ground broke off in a twelve-foot precipice; beneath it, beyond a narrow beach rounded like the back of a breaching whale, the water came up and curved over in a lazy surf.

"That's where we were headed, forty an hour. Like that!" He made a graphic swoop with his hand.

"I wish we had. Oh, I wish to *God* we had. We'd have got a kick out of *that*, anyway."

He looked at her quickly. She made a sad mouth. "I wish I'd been alone." Producing a little gold vanity case she snapped back the mirror, took out a stick of carmine, and pursed her lips in the pale light. Then rebellion carried her away again. "It's all too deathly pallid!" she cried, clapping the trinket shut and throttling it in a fist.

Meeting Erd's troubled stare she shrugged her shoulders and gave her hair a fling. "Well, then, if you don't want me to talk this way and tell you the truth, come take me back to the merry-go-round."

She turned, and he turned with her. It was clear on the rise here; the fog lay only in the hollows of the moor. Two miles away Gravel Hill stood up like

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an island, topped by the Riding Club with its streaks of veranda lights and the arcs of wheeling motor cars.

Erd laughed, not knowing what else to do.

"You'll hardly get back for the dance you promised—what's-his-name."

"That egg? He slobbers!"

She went on with a sudden heat, "*Life* slobbers, Erd. It's *too* pallid! All that silly squirm they call dancing; all the sweet cocktails and the bum Scotch and the fuddling and fondling and the stories they've simply got to tell you behind the lilac bush! I guess I'm fed up with it, that's why: I've swigged it to the dregs and the kick's gone. I'm flat, Erd, *flat!* . . . And yet—where do I go from here?"

Studying her from the corners of his eyes, this creature toward whose perfection all things had worked—a conquered continent, laboriously gathered wealth, old colleges—seeing her standing there in the attitude of the revolt of youth satiate, Erd felt a stirring of hope.

"I'm glad you're beginning to see ——"

"Oh, sush! *you* can say that, man. But look at me; I'm not ready to settle down and wither away quite yet. Life owes me a few thrills yet. I've got a few experiences coming to me. I have! I *have!* And I'm not a kid any longer, either. They've got to be wilder than a petting party or a gulp out of some lizard's flask behind the lilac bush. They've got to *hurt!*"

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She looked Erd in the eyes, her own narrowed.

"I'll tell you what I need. If this sticky, loathsome, pallid summer will ever go and the shooting season ever come around, then maybe I'll be more like myself again. Yes, yes, don't look like a fish; *yes!* I'd feel like a million dollars right now, and I know it, with the weight of a gun in my hands and a cold old wind blowing and the ducks flying. Erd, there's a kick left there. A bang, and a kick, and a duck ——"

Her mood changed swiftly. Her eyes lost their luster, and the brief animation went out of her tone.

"Ducks and rabbits! That's *some* wild adventure for a *grown* woman." She began to wail in real anguish, "Oh, Erd, I could cry like a babe; that's got away from me too; that's pallid too." Gripping the man's forearm in both her hands she shook it savagely. "It's got to be bigger than ducks! It's got to be wilder and fearfuller than Molly Cottontails; *I want it to kick!*" She stood there shivering. "That's that!"

Erd's face was red. He was embarrassed and he felt helpless.

"Come on, let's get back now." There was a hint of bluster. "I *told* you to bring a wrap. You're catching your death. Come!"

"There?" She nodded toward the clubhouse. "Not for perfect *worlds!*"

She pulled her elbow from between his fingers. Her skirts ballooning about her and her arms like fan-

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tastic wings, she was over the bank behind him and down to the beach in an avalanche of clods and sand.

He followed and caught up in the heavy going.

"Let's walk then, fast."

"Let's run! Miles! Like fools!"

Presently she slackened pace. "Who's that, ahead there?"

"I don't know, Til. He's been standing there the past long while. Coast-guard, I guess; he's in uniform, anyhow."

Mathilda trilled. "Leave me, fellow. I *devour* uniforms!"

Ben Agate, the patrol from the Never's station, glanced around with impatience at the sound of their footfalls behind him. Then, having grown a bit hardened in six years on the island to the kind of birds the summer seasons brought, he passed a hand over his mouth, spat to the left, and returned his attention to the point of rocks that broke the beach some twenty yards or so from where he stood.

Mathilda came up softly to his shoulder. She had forgotten her moods.

"Rum-runners?" she queried in a stealthy tone.

Agate shook his head.

"What, then?"

"You scared 'em. Be quiet and maybe they'll be comin' out again."

By and by the girl touched his sleeve. He fore-

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stalled her impatience, whispering out of the corner of his mouth:

"Look sharp, now. Keep your eyes glued on to that long flat rock just inside the end there and don't stir. They're having another try."

It was like staring at the black squares on the white ground of a chessboard and suddenly seeing them white squares on black. The first illusion was that the rock itself had come to life: that the whole of it moved slowly, turning wet facets to gleam in the moon's rays. Another wave, the seventh among sevenths, smothered the shelf, and the shapes that emerged from the draining green-white foam were three—three round sleek heads, three torsos, dark as basalt on the dark surface of the ledge, half-reared and swaying. In the distortion of the misted light, ranged all around by the pallor of the water and by the sound of it threshing in the crevices, the effect of their muteness and the mystery of their oscillating movements, like blindness trying the void, was magnified.

"But what on earth?" breathed Mathilda.

"Seals. What d'y' think?"

"You don't mean—honest-to-God *seals*!"

"Why, sure." Agate was gratified. "Don't you know a seal when you see it? You're s'prised they're here this time o' year, eh? They're only strays. They was in night before last; Ed Whalen seen 'em. Here they be, sure enough. Two cows and a bull—an' he's a good one, ain't he? Ain't he, though?"

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Mathilda let her breath out in a sigh. "What you *will* see when you haven't got your gun along! If that isn't the luck!"

"Luck's right. You shoot one o' them there, and you'd have the law down onto you quick enough. You'd get a good fat fine. Say! What in hellnation—excuse me—but what in time you whoopin' about that way? You've give 'em another scare, Miss, and now I guess they're gone for good!"

"Not for *good*—just for the night, you mean. They'll come again to-morrow night, don't you suppose?"

"Ask *them*!"

Rubbing his wrist over his mouth and spitting once again to the left, Agate lifted his boots out of the sand and resumed his eastward way.

Mathilda wheeled on Erd. Reaching up she pinned his cheeks between her palms and rocked his head from side to side in outrageous glee. She was beautiful. The teeth gleamed between her dark lips, and her eyes, enlarged, were soft around the lids with tears.

"Do you love me, old dear?"

Erd flushed and scowled. "Stop it, you!"

"Adore me, eh? Then take me back to the merry-go-round and dance, to-night. To-morrow night's another night again! We'll bring the guns."

The *Two Kates* came in through the shoals at dusk and lay at anchor a mile offshore. She was a power-

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sloop, built for swordfishing, but not in the business now. The pulpit still ornamented the stubby bow, to be sure, and the irons and lines were still ready to the hand, but the hold was full of Scotch and Irish whiskeys, billed from the Bahamas for St. Pierre et Miquelon.

The master was an old swordfisherman and he knew these waters well. He knew that, with the glass where it was, he was as safe lying here off the beach as he would have been twenty miles to sea; there were only half a dozen men alive who could have brought a vessel through the labyrinth of shoals behind him, and none of them was in the enforcement fleet. He was so snug here, indeed, that he had gone ashore in the dinghy, himself, partly to see his wife and partly to talk with a man who handled things, leaving his crew of three behind him as confidently as he might have left three rats, no matter what their morals, overnight in a trap.

Al Bede, the Frenchman, and Bloch, the Saba boy, were asleep in the cuddy. Only Hildegarde, the Georgia negro, was awake and about. Part of the time he reclined, lifted on an elbow, on the deck between the wheel-box and the taffrail, staring thoughtfully into the curtain of black velvet covering the sky, or out across the water, black too at this hour before moonrise and almost as flat as a lagoon in the semi-lee of the shallows beneath the soft drift of the southerly wind. Part of the time, driven by restlessness, he

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prowled the deck fore and aft, peering over the bows, halting at the cuddy-hatch to listen for the snores of his mates, peering over the stern, making the round of the little ship again and again.

In this act of prowling he was as soundless on his naked soles as a phantom, and very nearly as invisible. Clothed only in a pair of tar-stained dungaree pants and otherwise bare to the soft weather, as more tolerable to a man hardened by seasons in the Arctic, his darkness merged with the darkness of the night. Even in the formation of his flesh, which looked round and fat, as is often the case with strong swimmers, there was something of the quality of the night at sea, large, smooth, formless, hiding its power.

He was glad when, treading noiselessly in the dark, he could feel himself invisible. He wished he *were* a ghost, very often. Hildegarde was not his real name. He had gone by dozens, self-given; with every change of ship in the years of his wanderings he had rechristened himself, taking infinite pains with his papers. And this was a strange thing, since he had never committed a crime. His need of an alias, and one never too old, came from something buried more deeply in him than fear of the law. It would have made a white man laugh.

When he went back to throw himself on the deck near the wheel he put his elbows on the low rail and, resting his chin on his entwined fingers, stared straight

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down against the surface of the water, faintly vitreous under the cloud that cloaked the stars.

Presently, as he continued staring, as though his stare had been a solid to break and penetrate another solid, the surface was no longer there between his eyes and the depths; his vision, piercing it and passing on down through another atmosphere, began to pick up, glimmer by glimmer, the slow flight of things alive, the drift of creatures gelatinous and tiny, coruscating with pale phosphorescent fires, the lazy blur of flounders cruising the bottom, the sudden wheel of a greater fish, throwing out an arc of stars.

Once again, as on all such nights, it stirred the trouble in his mind. So it must have been that the eyes of the yellow woman had been able to penetrate the surface of the crystal ball she had held in her hand on that never-to-be-forgotten night, and to see moving within the depths of its other atmosphere things luminous to her alone.

For years it had been too occult a mystery even to puzzle about. Now, after other years of these rare nights when, with the stars darkened and the wind in the south, he had found it in himself to be capable of dissolving the faintly vitreous outside of the water, by a simple trick of staring, and of reading all its hidden events in scrawls of flame, it began to seem to him that he could lift at least a corner of the veil that had hidden from his youth the powers of that yellow woman who was known as *Zara the Great*.

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And so it was true and doubly true that what the soothsayer had said was sooth.

A school of mackerel streamed out from beneath the keel and upward across the man's inverted sight. Hundreds became thousands, till the sea for fathoms away on the beam was streaked with hairs of light, all combed out straight from the sloop's waterline, in terror. The reason for terror showed itself. In the midst of the faint threads a greater light flashed, turned on itself in a swoop of blue and was gone, leaving empty blackness behind.

"Sha'ks," the negro cogitated.

Again the hairs of light appeared and gathered, streaming in another direction a short toss off the quarter; again and again that whiplash of fire cracked and sent them vanishing in dim rays.

"Though I neveh seen no sha'ks swim like that befoh," he mused aloud.

He got up and walked toward the bows. Loitering a moment at the cuddy-hatch to hearken to the sleepers, he passed to the port rail and stood erect there, gazing down the side.

A milky cloud appeared beneath him. It floated toward him, increasing in size and brightness, till it touched and broke the surface of the water. In that instant, by one of those freaks inherent in the phenomenon of phosphorescence, it sloughed off its cloud and became a silhouette, drawn in clinging beads of flame.

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Hildegarde, when he had blinked once or twice, withdrew from the rail. Reaching behind him, he found and lifted from its chocks on the side of the house the swordfish iron that was there. Passing a hand over its length he made sure that the barb was settled properly in the ashwood shank and that the line ran freely from it to the coil in the tub abreast of the mast. He peeped over the rail once more. The shape still rode there, swaying lazily between the transparent elements. Stepping forward and bringing his right arm over his shoulder in the same motion, he flung the lance straight down.

A streak shot away from the boat's side; for a moment then there was no sound but the whine of the line coming out of the tub. Marking this with a practised ear, Hildegarde flipped a bight of it presently over a near-by pin and began to snub. The pressure eased sooner than he had expected. The iron must have bitten very near to the heart.

He began to haul in, hand over hand. Bede's head was thrust out of the cuddy. "W'at ze 'ell? You weesh to wake up ze devil?"

"Gi'me a hand here. I got somethin'."

The Saba boy tumbled out too, not quite knowing where he was. Among them they brought the carcass home and heaved it out on the deck, where it lay enormous in the narrow space between the rail and the house.

"That's no fish!" said the Saba boy.

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The negro made a scornful sound, half chuckle, half grunt.

Shielding it from shoreward, the Frenchman scratched a match and let it shine on the prize. "*Corps du diable—un veau marin!*"

Hildegarde got down on his knees beside the seal and passed a hand over the hide, laughing with glee: "Befoh God, this heah one is a big one!"

Now that the Saba boy was fully awake his Dutch blood reasserted itself; it was he this time who made the scornful sound. "You expected you had a great prize, what? That seal is no good to you. You expected you had fetched up a fine fur coat, eh, old chap? That's a *hair* seal. A cat would have been better." He yawned, shaking his head. "You may just heave it overboard yourself; you've made me lose enough sleep already with your foolishness."

Bede, an impressionable fellow, ready to follow anyone's lead, yawned too, went off with an angry shrug, and let himself down the ladder after Bloch. For a few minutes Hildegarde heard them discussing him below in scurrilous tones; then abruptly all was still again.

The moon had risen. Blurred by the thin mist, its light fell diffused and weak, throwing no shadows. When he had stretched himself on his stomach on the house, Hildegarde rested his chin on his crossed arms and gazed down at the dead seal. His lips moved in amusement tempered by indignation.

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"That Bloch, he's a Bloch-head foh shuah. What he think? He think I don' know the diff'nce between one kine o' seal an' 'nothah kine o' seal? He think I stick this heah crittah foh to git a fuh coat? He think *that* why I kill 'im?"

Well, then, why *had* he killed this seal? The question, following the other as two follows one, presented itself to Hildegarde's troubled imagination. And as three follows two: Why did he do any of the thousand strange things he did? Why did he live the life he lived, a fugitive from no pursuer, a man of peace unable to find peace?

"Wha'-foh ain't I like folks? Tell me that."

This was the never-varying train. Whenever, on a night like this, he began by staring down through the black skin of the water, sooner or later he would end by trying to stare in through the black skin of himself.

"Wha'-foh? How come?"

Memories stirred. His mind passed back over his voyages, his brutish, ill-paid and thankless labors, the succession of his aliases, like a succession of bulkheads slammed shut before the creeping of an impalpable flood; Hildegarde Dixon, Barrymore Wills, Wilson Barry, Algernon James, James Andrew Alger—and so on through the others—on down the monotonous years of his adventurous past.

Each one of these men that he had been had lived a life, brief but separate. They were like cards in a

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well-worn deck that he could riffle under the thumb of his memory.

Barrymore Wills went to the Arctic.

Wilson Barry went to Australia in a Danish brig.

James Andrew Alger was in the Arctic too. He was a sealer. But that was not the memorable thing about Jim Andy's thirteen months and thirteen days of life. Among them all it was Jim Andy who had succeeded in daring to rebel. In the city of Seattle he got drunk on sailor gin. From first to last he knew what he was doing, and he was terrified. Even when he had to lean against a lamp-post to keep himself from falling, one part of his head was as clear as crystal, and aghast—aghast at the drunken nerve of this nigger seaman, Jim Andy Alger, who would insist on standing there and daring fate, staring into the faces of white ladies with sullen, bold, defiant, abominating eyes . . . expecting all the while to be shot and killed for his black insolence, nothing less.

Two days later (when he got out of jail) it was a new man, a scared and repentant ducky by the name of Algernon James, who shipped in a three-master for Nova Scotia, through the Canal.

It was this same Algy James that was shipwrecked and cast away. Marooned on one of the lesser keys of the Caribbean, for upward of two months he lived alone. The only voices he heard were those of the sea fowl. He ran among the flocks and flew with them, leaping from shelf to shelf. Sometimes he swam with

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the sharks, diving deep, having no fear of the gliding shadows. One of them he killed with his sheath knife in a battle ten feet deep. Then he came up and sat on a peak of rock and sang a song without tune or words. He slept among the rocks where the lizards slept. That space of two months, escaped from humanity, the hail-fellow of beasts, was Paradise.

So now, as he lay dreaming over the body of the dead bull seal, his memory ran back over the riffing cards, ran back years and years into the years when he was still his own self, the Georgia nigger-kid, Roboam. And when it had run that far it came to the yellow woman.

She had a fold of soiled brocade on her head, confined by a hoop of silver. At times her face and the glass ball she held before it were cast in a hot red light, at other times in a cold and vivid blue. In the changes the skeleton half hidden in the carpets hung up around her throne seemed to approach and retreat. A curious-smelling vapor was in the air.

The boy Roboam could no longer bear it. No matter what the satanic consequence he had to cry out, as he had cried twice before, "Thah's my two dollahs thah! Wha'-foh-foh God's sake don' you tell me whah my brothah Japhrum's to?"

Again it was not Zara the Great, but the invisible attendant beyond the brazier that answered. "Sah-lence! Kain' you see she's tranced? Sah-lence, you, an' wait!"

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Again he nerved himself to wait with patience in this night of no patience, and to keep silence in this silence thronged with distant hubbubs: sounds of feet running in crowds on pavements, sounds of voices, many and confused, or single, lifted in terror, or in idiot exultation, the crackle of flames among the negro shanties, crackle of trolley-car windows, crackle of white folks' rifles shooting to kill, crackle of policemen's revolvers shooting not to kill. . . .

Oh, was Japhrum there, was Japhrum there?

The sweat flowed down the boy's cheeks. His knees pressed together to keep from knocking. Once more he would have had to dare the powers and open his mouth had the conjureess not saved him by opening her own.

"I visions . . I visions a cullad boy 'bout eighteen yeah ol', got on a brown coat and a payah striped gray pants ——"

"Tha's Japhrum! Tha's him, yassuh!"

"Sahlence!" The attendant was moving about. "Kain' you see she's tranced?"

Then the strained high singsong continuing, "I visions him comin' 'long through Jim Bayliss' alley-way, I does. Right heah in the mi'st o' this heah magic crystal I visions him true as life. Comin' 'long out o' Bayliss' alley. Trompin' soft in the shadow 'hind o' the Heli'trope Bah-room. I visions him comin' to'a'ds a doah. I visions him comin' *in* at a doah. *I visions*

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it's that thah ve'y doah behin' yoh back—thah—NOW!"

The boy turned, wave after wave of prickles running up to his scalp, and saw a figure in the incense-clouded dusk. It was Japhrum. For a moment, between terror and joy, he could say nothing. It was Japhrum that spoke.

"I was comin' 'long into heah, aks the conjuh-woman whah-to you am, Roboam."

At that there arose a fine soft sound of laughter, sardonic, secret and wise. But when the boys turned to look at the great Zara her lips were tightly closed again in the waning ray of blue from the brazier, her face was as rapt as death, and her eyes engrossed in the globe of glass.

"I visions . . . I visions . . ."

Perhaps it was the dying light, or perhaps it was the deaths in the night, but now it seemed as if a change came over the hanging face. Its aspect was no longer that of the watcher, but of the listener. As though amplified by her own demoniac powers, the voices of black panic and white hate obtruded from the distance, drew closer, loudened and pressed around, till they were pulses booming behind the ears. A rhythmic twitching, little at first but growing in violence, convulsed the skin of the crystal-gazer's face; her lids sank till her eyeballs were no more than dull blue gleams, an epileptic twinge caught up a corner of her lip, baring one long tooth.

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"I visions . . . I visions visions I kain't help vision-in' now. God an' the Debbil! . . . You, Roboam, chil', draw nigh unto Zara and come heah."

If the boy could have turned and bolted, as terror counseled, the life that followed would have been a different life.

"Draw nigh! I says it twice an' I says it thrice! Come heah!"

He approached. The woman's hand imprisoned his neck, holding his head straight before the glass with the strength of an iron vise. The fingers were cold and the palm was hot.

"Roboam, you hol' yoh breaf an' you pray to God an' the Debbil an' you staah whah yoh eyes is!"

There was no breath in him to hold. He stared where his eyes were, but for the shivering life of him all he could see was a glass ball with a film of dim blue light running around under its skin.

"I visions a man grown," he heard her voice in the gloom. It had risen to a queer high note, and there it held, behind her palate. "I visions this man by name Roboam. Look at this man smile an' show his fine white teef. Neveh I lay my eyes on such a man. His muscles, they the same like a stallion race hoss, and his skin it lay oveh 'em as smooth an' shiny as silk an' satin. I visions him walkin' on top o' the yuth an' admiahin' the fruits thah-off. . . . I visions . . .

"An' I visions—heah befoh my eyes I visions—God an' the Debbil, what's this ol' Zara visions—collectin'

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an' cogallatin' out o' the witch-mist? God an' Deb-bil, I neveh seen a gal like this, with di'monds in huh eahs! Haih the colāh o' ripe fiel' cohn, an' black eye-lashes as long an' thick as ropes! An' wha's this heah red rose-blossom gone an' drap its petals onto them cheeks? . . . Tu'n round a little mite moah, white gal. Much obliged to you. Theah! But I's bewildud. This ain't wintah in the mountains now, foh lan' sake! Pshaw, now, you got fooled, ol' Zara; that ain't no snow bank up no'th; tha's a gal's throat. Them thah's two shouldahs an' two ahms. . . . But how come all this cloud o' mist an' shimmuh? Lan'! that ain't nothin' no moh'n a pore cheap little dance dress, cost only a thousan' dollahs a yahd in a quality stoah. . . . But how come you can undehtake to dance, white gal, on two ankles you kain't sca'cely see through a mic'scope, an' two feet get lost on the broad of a man's han'? . . . An' wha'-foh you smile with yoh ripe red lips, an' wha'-foh you cotch a breaif, an' wha'-foh you laugh? ——"

The negro on the sloop's house lifted his head from his arms with a jerk. The mists had thinned; a fuller light of the moon, sailing high now, described the contours of his shaven skull, his neck, and the suave barrel of his torso, over which the skin lay smooth and shining, "like silk and satin."

He looked north; he looked south. A rim of white ran all around the iris of either eye. Humping to his

knees, he crawled off the cuddy and began to pace the starboard deck. He moved without a sound, but he was no longer invisible.

He knew from long experience the futility of trying to fight off this reasonless cringing of the nerves when he recalled the yellow woman's prophecy; still, the instinct to resist was there. The cuddy was dark enough; he thought he would go below and lie in his bunk. His resolution failed. Turning away, he retreated aft and flung himself down and stared at the water, a furrow between his brows.

He could no longer look through the skin of the sea; it had become opaque and bright. His attention, catching at anything, fixed upon a thread of scum rings left by bursting bubbles a little way off the stern. Deepening the furrow on his brow, he set himself deliberately to wonder what manner of fish it might be that had left that filament of rime to betray its passage through the blue gloom of the sea.

Another thread appeared, slightly to the left, a dozen bubbles, mirroring each a bead of moon before it vanished. And suddenly a head was thrust from the water, shaking drops away and turning, as Hildegard's own head might have turned inquiringly, on a short thick neck.

The negro flattened on the planks. "Ol' Mistah Seal got a wife."

He hazarded another peep and ducked again. "Two wives, by gol! Cruisin' roun' han' in han', mis-

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trustin' roun', spec'latin' roun' whah they ol' man done gone ascended into heaven to. . . . Damn! Wha'-foh I ain't got that thah iron handy *now?*'"

He could have wormed his way along the deck to the harpoon, but he felt it would have taken too long; once he were to show himself above the line of the hull he knew that the cows, curious but shy, would be gone with a flick of flippers.

His hand came on something on a ledge of the wheel-box. It was a knife used for cutting gear, the blade as fine as a skewer from long whetting. The seals were drifting toward the port side all the while. Creeping to the starboard rail and sliding over it like a big soft inchworm, he let himself down.

Not a sound and hardly a ripple marked his entrance into the water. Holding the knife between his lips he sank. The sloop's bottom, foul with a long season, gave his fingers a purchase; turning on his back he handed himself down to the keel; once under it he gave the oaken beam a kick and sent himself out into the submerged moonlight beyond in a single long smooth plunge.

Neither of the cows had seen him. He lay, face up, a dozen feet below, as he might have lain on a bed of air in half a dream, watching the drift of phantasmal shapes, dark and graceful, sustained in the green-blue dusk of a chamber without walls. He was chilled, but for the moment the numbing of his muscles was not unpleasurable, like being safely dead yet vividly

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alive. His lungs wanted air, but he hated to move. It seemed to him that he could have remained here forever and been glad, at rest and at peace in the cold sanctuary of the sea, bathed in light yet hidden, rocked by the buried billows of the tides, the play-fellow and the secret-sharer of beasts and mites and monsters, of whom, strangely enough in this fearful man, he had no fear.

Of those seals silhouetted above him, with their sharp dog teeth and their powerful muscles, he was not in the least afraid. Even as they grew larger on his sight, being no longer terrified by anything, he began to forget that he had come to strike terror. The knife escaped his lips and drifted lazily before his eyes; he could have caught it, but he made no move.

The shapes became distinct and enormous. Whether he would or not, the air in his lungs was carrying him toward the air. He was seen.

He was rocked in his bed; the light above him boiled and brightened; under his back passed a current like a streak of wind. He was aware of shadows, wheeling swiftly and lost, swooping and lost again. Turned on a side, as a log is careened in an eddy, he found himself looking into a face. It was as dark and as glossy as his own. The brow was wrinkled in absurd perplexity, and strings of bubbles, like pearls, ran in the creases. The two eyes, magnified by a trick of moon in water, were full of amazement, inquiry, fascination, and alarm.

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Hildegarde's head popped from the sea. Blowing out the stale breath and taking in a clean one he began to laugh. Still laughing, he threshed the water with his arms and legs to start the blood. He looked at the sloop, lying behind him like a high dark wall, shook his head at it, spattering drops in a ring, flashed his teeth in mutinous derision and, laying his face in the water, set off in the opposite direction.

He swam with the trudgeon stroke, leaving a white wake behind. He was no longer cold; the continued rhythmic play of his muscles and the rush of the water along his body warmed him and soothed his soul.

Here he was a man. Sweeping at easy speed across this kingdom of transparencies he was a lord. Not even the prophetic words of the yellow woman could molest him; here they suffered a magic more potent even than her own, and became witch babblings remembered from some childhood fairy tale. "Sleeky, shiny, game-shootin' gun!" Those were the yellow woman's words. Fabulous nonsense! What would a gun do here? Sink; that's what it would do. Down, down, down to the bottom, its powder soaked, and nothing more fearful than seaweed "droolin' outen its mouf" . . . and as for "bullet-blood all runnin' out on to the groun'"—that proved it! *Ground!*

He slowed up after a while and rested, treading water, his head in the air. On the silver plain two other heads were lifted. The seals converged and

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consulted. Presently, trailing faint arrowheads of ripple, they floated nearer, wrinkling their noses in wonder at this bizarre dark creature come up from the ocean's depths.

The man waited, keeping his chuckles in his throat. When they had come to within ten yards of him and began to hesitate he put his toes together and sank. He went down dead for about his own length, then flipped over and swam away with all his strength. He lost a chuckle and it made a bubble. A wild joy of play swept him. He ramped. When he planed up to breathe again his new playfellows reappeared, yards ahead.

He began to upbraid them in whispered glee, "You think yoh's so smaht! You think yoh's such rip-snohtin' speedy swimmahs! You look out for this heah cullad boy; he goin' tweak yoh tailses!"

They fled before his churning charge. He made a ruse of it and had a joke on them; diving, he changed direction and came up far away on a diverging course. When he saw them elevate their heads, mill around for a moment in indecision, then turn to make after him, he smacked his lips and guffawed with the delight of a ten-year-old. That's what he was.

"I's glad I's been a good boy and ain't done no evil. I's glad, oh Lawd, I's glad. . . . You little debbils you, you look out foh Roboam; he's full o' tricks."

He submerged once more as the seals ranged up, and at a fathom's depth lay motionless, "playing pos-

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sum." He watched them wheeling about him in mystified orbits. He was sensible of the beauty of their strong and sinuous shapes and of the flowing grace of their movements; he wished that he too were as beautiful and as lithe and swift as these sea widows; he wished that he were a seal. When the bolder of the two, or the less wise, backed water in mid-swoop and lay hovering at arm's length from him, studying his face with disturbed soft-brown eyes, he felt of a sudden a bond of likeness and affection which he had never been able to feel as subsisting between himself and anything alive in the world of everyday. More deeply he wished that it were not merely a strange and beatific interlude; that he were indeed a seal, the same big-shouldered bull he had slain; and that he might go on forever with these twain, striking out boldly on long migrations across the empty seas, diving through green caverns where no man was known, rolling and rollicking in the slant sunlight of lost beaches, riding the tops of storm-billows and laughing at the storm.

Once more his lungs were bursting, and again the light in the purling crystal grew a paler and a purer blue. The words of the soothsayer rang fainter and fainter in his ears.

"An' wha'-foh you smile, an' wha'-foh you cotch a breaf, white gal, an' wha'-foh you laugh an' stroke the bar'l o' that sleeky, shiny game-shootin' gun you got thah, with the smoke droolin' outen its mouth, an'

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wha'-foh you suck yoh red lips like they was wil'-bee honey when you look at pretty Roboam layin' thah on the groun'—layin' thah in the witch-light, so quiet, so peaceful, doin' nobody no mannah o' hahm? But, God heself an' Debbil heself, Roboam chil', how come you so paltry lazy? Wha'-foh you got yoh big mouf open to the sky? Wha'-foh you big teef shin-in' to the sky? How come all this heah bullet-blood runnin' ouden yoh skull-pate all oveh the groun'? Dead! Dead! DEAD!"

The head and shoulders of the man who was a seal broke the surface in a white fountain. The sound of his laughter, rich and vibrant, ran over the water and away through the smoke ring of the mists and mingled there with the laughter of lazy surf. The seals dived as they arose, startled; then appeared again, swimming away.

The one fear he had now was that he would lose them. "Don't you be scahed," he breathed between his lips. "I wouldn' hahm n' huht you. Soonah cut off my own right han'."

The water lost clarity and took on a milky hue. Strong forces lifted the swimmer and let him fall.

"I's glad I's been good. I's glad I's walk in the road o' the humble an' kep' my eyes on the groun'. Wha's that the preachah's always sayin', 'bout the res'rection an' the life? I done been res'rected an' this am the life. . . . So, my beauties! So, my angel lovelies! Whah you gone to in this heah su'f-

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watah? Come 'long back a secon', my pretties, show yoh ol' man whah you gone."

A blade of rock heaved out of the foam and struck at him. Evading the thrust by a powerful swerve in mid-breaker, he slid into its lee and lay there, chin out, his eyes roving over the ribbon of the lost beach of his phantasy and up a blue-gray slope of stone.

"Thah, thah, my angels," he crooned, so low that it was drowned by the wash of the empty sea. "'Tain't nobody but me; 'tain't. You knows I wouldn't hahm n' huht you, my pretties; no, no, no, no."

With infinite gentleness he slid his fingers up over the rim of the rock. One of the seals edged higher; the other, fascinated, stayed her ground, half reared, rocking a little from side to side. Still with that infinitude of gentleness he pulled himself breast-out on the shelf.

Lost beaches. . . .

He began to croon again. Resting on one hip and lifting on his elbows, he began to rock with a scarcely perceptible motion from side to side.

Empty seas. . . .

But something had happened. Lightning in the mist. A thud of wind. A thud of thunder. And where the pretty seals had been, before the gunshot, there was nothing now but rock.

"No, by golly! by damn! No-suh! No!"

He leaped to scramble after them, where they flipped from sight over the edge. His leap was an

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inch. The thud of wind that had struck his legs had numbed them! they too were nothing but rock. They frightened him; he tried to get away from the dead things, jumping his body along by kicking at the stone with the heels of his hands. He threw himself this way and that with all the enormous strength of his arms.

In the smoky air there was more lightning. Another wind of lead. He heard no thunder this time, for his head had caved in.

His elbows buckled and he began to roll. Over and over he went rolling. He fell off something and into something, and it was dark.

It was not quite dark now. He had fallen into the bottom of a deep cleft outside the shelf. It was full of shadow, and of a sucking sound. When the breakers came it filled half to the brim with water, and when they retired the water drained away. Hildegard knew nothing of all this.

He knew only that the blue light waned and slowly waxed and waned again, and in the cold gloom he heard the yellow woman:

“. . . God an' Debbil, I neveh seen such a gal like this, with di'monds in huh eahs. . . .”

As, with that curious sucking sound, the gleam from the brazier began to brighten, he perceived that Zara had moved the crystal sphere, lifting it higher. And looking up against its nether side now, of a sudden his eyes did pierce the skin; he did see at last, “collect-

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in' an' cogallatin' out o' the witch mist," the white shape the conjureess was seeing.

"Yes. . . . Haih the colah o' ripe fiel' cohn, an' black eyelashes as long an' thick as ropes. . . . Yes. Tu'n round a little mite moah, white gal. . . . Much obliged to you. . . ."

Perhaps it was the sputtering and sucking sound from the brazier; but now the soothsayer's voice had taken on a new queerness. It was as though it broke in upon itself from moment to moment with other voices.

" . . . That ain't no snow bank; tha's a gal's throat; them's two shouldahs an' two ahms." . . .
"I'm sure I got the big one, Erd. You saw him kick, yourself. Oh, I got him, all right, all right. I could dance! . . ."

"But how come you can undehtake to dance, white gal?" . . . "It was that damn wave, after the second shot. But we should worry, Erd. Why don't you give me a glad look, you fish, you? Smile!" . . .
"An' wha'-foh you smile, with yoh ripe red lips, an' wha'-foh you cotch a breaf in yoh snowdrif' bosom."
. . . .

"I's dreamin' the ol' bad damn dream agin, tha's what I is . . ."

" . . . An' wha'-foh you laugh . . . an' wha'-foh you stroke the bar'l o' that sleeky, shiny, game-shootin' gun. . . ."

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“ . . . I feel like a million dollars, Erd. This is the life! Let's go! . . . ”

“ . . . Whah-to you gone to, my pretties, my angels? . . . ”

The blue coal in the brazier was turning red now.

“ . . . *An' how come you so paltry lazy, Ro-boam, chil'?* . . . ”

As it reddened it darkened swiftly and went out.

SAILOR ! SAILOR !

III

SAILOR ! SAILOR !

I HAVE crossed oceans and seen the world's rivers, but no water has ever touched my imagination with quite the magic of the brown flood of the High Line. In High Line Ditch I launched the first ships I can remember, and there I learned to swim.

When I was ten or eleven, folks in Denver still kept cows, and in the summer I used to go out with the South Side herd. It came up the road in the clear dewless mornings, a smoke of dust past the standpipe, past the university and the professors' houses. There, bareback on my tall horse, I fell in with the other kids on theirs; musically, to the clickety-click of split hoofs, the yapping of "shep" dogs, and the seven-beat song of the meadowlark, we passed out from beneath the shade of Scholtz's orchard, cool on the road for half a mile, and mounted at the cows' pace the bald rise of the plain toward the grazing under the High Line.

The first boy out of the water clapped on first of all his cap and yelled "King!" The second yelled "Queen!" What the third yelled I have forgotten. (I have not.)

But then, with the muddy liquid still cool in the hair in the waxing heat, it was pleasant to lie on that baked embankment and blink down into the hollow of

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the world, the wide and nearly treeless valley of the South Platte broken by vivid squares of alfalfa, the Queen City a compact and intricate toy city in its bottom, the wall of the Rockies at its thither rim seeming hardly higher than we on our dyke, so immense it was in its other magnitude, visible two hundred miles from north to south, and so clear in every detail of its modeling. On the face of Pike's at seventy-five miles, between the snow and the shadows every crevice was drawn plain. I have known boys who claimed they could see the cairn of stones on Gray's.

It was pleasant, I say, as some things that are known and humdrum are pleasant, but it was not adventurous; adventure lay between the dust-yellow banks of the ditch behind. There only was distance, distance. Lying on one's stomach with the chin nearly in the water, the fifteen-foot spread of slowly sweeping, coffee-colored water widened in the swift perspective of the plains-boy's dream. Ripples grew waves, waves blue rollers creamed with spume, or black waves where storms wandered and ships drove aslant with singing spars, or green glass again where privateersmen warped through the windless stealth of tropic moonlights, or the Swiss Family plundered their wreck, or Easy rowed ashore. And once, on a day never to be forgotten, with my living eyes there, low to the water, I saw a living fish.

The best grazing, as I remember it, was to the south of the Bend; for nearly a mile there it was the freest

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of cactus and prairiedog towns, all along to the barbed wire of Flack's alfalfa. That alfalfa was always, to us of the herd, what a lee shore in a gale must be to the mariner. Flack was a devil, but little less than the fear of the ranchman's violence was the terror of the cattle's "bloating," if ever they should find a fallen fence-strand and worm into that belly-deep paradise of green. Forever it lay on our souls. Forever, from the midst of a casino game in a horse's shadow, or out of the deep of sleep, some kid would start afoot, scramble up the ditch embankment, and shade his eyes down over the scattered herd, to make sure. And if, once reassured, his gaze went astray into Flack's, across the green ribbon of the hay, to where a browner ribbon marked the melon field, and if his mouth began to water, he could shiver a little in the arid heat to think of bold Louie Swensen, who, creeping in there on a night, came within an inch of putting his hand down on the pan of a wolf trap, a dim double question mark of steel set in wait in the tangled starlight among the vines.

I shall never forgive Flack for a thing he did. He can never undo it. It is still there, twisting my life in little ways, after thirty years.

One day he came driving to us up the outside of his fence in his yellow sulky. For once his grin looked human; amity shone in his eyes.

"You kids like mushmelons?" he called from between his thin high wheels. "Got more'n I want this

The Man Who Saw

year. Go on in, help yourselves. What's eating you? Hope to die, I mean it. Go on in there and help yourselves."

We got between the barbs. We ran through the alfalfa, through the narrow lanes made by the cross-ditches, our legs cool with the under-air, our heads dull and dazzled. We descended upon that melon field. Knives open, eyes round, drunk as gods, we scuttled on hands and knees from hill to hill, thumbing the navels of the gray-veined cantaloups, abandoning the prettiest here for one still prettier on a vine to come.

But then there came a strange figure, a lank man with a shotgun, threshing through the corn beyond; two figures, for behind him there waded a woman, a youngish woman with a shrill voice, a big stomach, and a little head, hallooing him on; then four, when two dogs as big as steers broke from the corn.

How we ran! How we tripped, sprawled, drowned in the green dark of the alfalfa, and up and on again, floundering, and the pads of dogs everywhere! That was the day I learned that if you face on a dog suddenly and scream on a certain note, the dog will turn tail. And that was the day we learned that Flack had sold his ranch.

I have said that it was on the soupy tide of the High Line I launched my first ship. I cannot remember, as a matter of fact, what the first one was; it was probably a buffalo chip or a length of sunflower stem. Somewhere in the procession there was a sardine can

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with a horned toad for captain. I think the proudest thing I can recollect of my youth was the time I sent the *Daisy* away. The *Daisy* was a toy given me on my birthday, a skiff eight inches long, perhaps, unpainted soft wood, worth a quarter. But what was it worth to my soul! Like quicksilver in a sluice it gathered into itself the gold of fantasy; the winter cargoes it had borne across the sitting-room carpet and around Cape Sofa would have foundered the *Flying Cloud* herself; no treasure quite like the *Daisy* have I ever had.

But if a man would save his treasure, he must lose it. One summer day at the High Line, manned by a sand lizard and some beetles, I waved the ship out of the harbor formed by the hole in the bank at the Flack ditch gate, and quite suddenly, once I had seen it clear and falling away on the brown tide that discolors the waters off the mouth of the Amazon, I turned myself around and stared in another direction, resolute never to look and never to see it again.

I am proud, I say. By that act I first created. I begat a life. From the corner there of my eye of renunciation the *Daisy* stood away on a voyage that after thirty years is not yet run. How many times has she not encircled the blue globe by now? How many times, stunned by cold and the repeated blows of the whirlpool, has she not looked at the black cliffs of Magellan, or, more sweetly wind-borne, at the cerulean wraith of Table Mountain, or, becalmed, into

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the slant eyes of pirates along her bulwarks in the China Seas? How many deaths has she not skirted on coral reefs with that magic keel of whitewood (with the carpet lint caught in it) which neither barnacle may encrust nor weed befoul? How many others, in the narrowing leads of ice floes, in the white wake of the whale?

I thought I was alone that day. I had meant to be. With the *Daisy* hidden in the bulge of my blouse I had sneaked away from the horse ring, leaving the others deep in the stories herd boys tell in the sleepy early afternoon. Ray Bleeker would not have understood. He had his greatness; he could chew tobacco in school and swallow the spittle; he was a genius, his stomach was so strong. But this business he would not have fathomed; he would have run along the bank with a stick, prodding the *Daisy* off of sunken tumble-weeds.

But as I stood there, staring dead south and swallowing my heart, there came to my ears a faint note of screeching. And there, away across the alfalfa, beyond the melons, deep in the corn as I had last seen her, was the woman with the big stomach and the little head, still (it seemed) denouncing me shrilly and wagging at me accusing hands. It was hard to catch her words, but I thought I made out, "That's one of 'em." Then I wanted to run. I was not alone, after all.

The new ranchman, who had come up unremarked and was standing behind me watching in a muse the

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departure of the *Daisy*, was more than six feet tall, and built like a slab. He had on denim pants, a cloth vest, a collarless shirt printed in forget-me-nots, and carried a gunny sack of tools. This he let fall beside the ditch gate, which was a new one, not quite finished, with cuttings of lumber all around. Frozen as I was, as soon as he opened his mouth I knew him for none of us, on account of his "R's."

"Where's she for?" was what he said.

"Wh-wh-where's who for?"

"The vessel off there? 'Round the Horn?"

"Oh, mister!" (Where was there ever a man like that?) "Oh, m-m-mister!"

He sat down on the crossbar of the sluice, so his head was nearly level with mine. He had a large mouth and large ears, and leathery sunken cheeks that made the cheek bones stand out like knobs beneath his rather small gray eyes. The woman was still carrying on down in the fodder, the thirsty whine of a mosquito, itching at the nerves. The red crept up to his temples.

"Aw, shut up! shut up!" He winced. He scowled. He hardened his neck. But then, ashamed that I had heard his muttering, and penitent, he fell to upbraiding me, if with no more than half a heart.

"You kids ought not to be into my melons; you know you oughtn't to."

Here was my chance. I began to pour out the tale of Flack's infamy. He distended the bellows of his cheeks as he listened, and as if to avoid my eyes

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turned his own away along the ditch. A crease appeared between them.

"Gone down!" he exclaimed.

At that I forgot injustice and remembered the ship. "*Sunk?*"

"No, no," he said in haste. "Down out of sight, I mean. Hull down under the skyline. Hatches battened, watches set, off soundings, snug at sea."

As Flack I can never forgive, Coffin I can never repay. Winking and snuffing, I picked up a remnant of two-by-six, and had my knife open and at it before I recollected in whose company I was. Then I made haste to hesitate.

"You going to use this, mister? I couldn't have it, I don't suppose."

"Why not? Whittle ahead!" He got up, waved his arms at that swollen mosquito of a woman, and with a spurious energy pawed among his tools and got a hammer from his sack. He put a spike at random in the flat of a board and pounded. The blows rang loud down the bare declivity of the plain. They accomplished their purpose; his wife turned and went back toward the ranch buildings. Between the legs of the horses at a distance I saw the kids aroused and spying, their mouths open (I could imagine) to see me at my ease up there with that man. I stood out in better silhouette and went on hacking at my wood.

But already the spurious energy was failing. Half-way of a second spike the hammering ceased. The

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man, his shoulders fallen forward, sat looking down over his fence and across the dusty green rectangle of his acres and the rusty red cubes of his house and barns, and so I thought he would fall asleep there before he was through, he seemed so dull.

But then: "What you think you're doing there?" I heard from him, and found his attention shifted to me and the bit of lumber I was trying, with my dull blade, to give a prow. "Ship building, eh?" He looked funny. He flushed to his ears. He yanked his shoulders about, took his hammer head from the dust and hit the half-driven spike a blow. But after that he turned quickly, as if exasperated, and said, holding out a hand: "You'll never get a great ways that way, sonny. Lend it here a sec'."

He fished a saw out of his bag, and in a minute he had given the block one end like a paling and another like half a hexagon. "See? You'd have taken all night to it, son. Your knife's none too sharp, anyhow." He whipped his own from a pocket. "Always keep mine in trim. Watch here."

He fell to rounding off the rough angles of the sawing, and his words were true. Longer and longer curled the pale feathers of the pine. A light waxed in his eyes. Sweat rolled down the gutters of his nose.

The sun stood at its hottest—half past two. Half the cows were down, catching naps over their cuds. The pale blue mountains danced. A far stridor of grasshoppers, that was all the sound there was in a

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hundred miles, save when Coffin, wiping his sleeve across his face, clattered after something new inside his sack. A gouge. A pinch of brads. An end of pipe, like a napkin ring: he sawed the lead with the saw.

There I sat, mouth wide open. Water into wine! What's water into wine? Never before, never since, have I so really been to school; it still stands today as the vividest single piece of my education. To see a man take heterogeneous homely things, dead scraps, and from them to bring out one thing alive and strange and brave and beautiful, his only magic his two hands. It was a hollow shell, finned with lead, bearing on a slender mast a sail cut of one of my father's handkerchiefs. So he took it, and lying, feet up and head down the embankment, sent it away on the muddy stream.

For a moment, after it had left his hand, it arrowed on with the impetus given it, across the lazy current. There was always an instant so, with all my ships, of aim and willfulness, before they surrendered to the stream.

The stream came from the south. The wind blew thin from the south and west. Everything that was borne or blown went north. Any fool knew that.

When the boat the man had made before my eyes from a hanky, a pipe, and a butt of pine went east, not north, something happened to the cosmic scheme

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that can happen so disastrously only once. It was like seeing God caught off his guard.

The wind blew that shell, and blew it down, till the water was over and into it next second, every second I was sure. The current dragged it, and dragged it down, but with its head half meeting the stream and a tiny wake behind it, it would not *be* dragged down; amazing, it swam straight on across the High Line Ditch.

The man made sounds in his windpipe. "Go it!" His face grew crimson, if only with all the blood running down from his legs into his head. "Carry it! Hold her up to it! Drive her! Go on!" While I kneeled and stared.

Nothing could wake me but the voyage's end. When that happened abruptly, in the thorns of a Russian thistle half submerged on the other shore, I jumped up from my knees in a fever and began to put off the straps of my overalls. But the man was ahead of me. Shoes and socks, pants and everything, into the water he went, waist-deep across, like Gulliver in the frontispiece.

Rescuing the creature from her spiny anchorage, he clambered up the bank, and I thought he wanted her and was afraid I would ask for her, he set off at such a pace upstream. But when he had gone thirty yards he stopped and calculated, moved a few more paces, got down on his stomach, and launched her away on her return.

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Now of course, with the wind on her other side, she came with the current, but all the same she came sailing, sailing. Northward drifting, but Westward Ho! And he had figured it so nicely that when she had won to within two arm's-lengths of my coast, right there was the eddy reaching seaward from between the harbor heads of the ditch gate to bring her in. And in she came sweetly, mast spiring, cloth aflutter in the lee of the sun-cracked foreland, her way dying, toward the mud.

But no mud was she to reach. In the nick of time I had grabbed a board and pressed it into the bank to take the tiny impact of her arrival. My heart turned over. If a man had made a ship, a boy had made a dock.

I had done more — I had made a seaport, a sudden city. By the time my strangest of ranchmen came thin-legged and squelching down my coast I had reared the first of my buildings, a cutting of two-by-four, tall at the dock's head, and he gave me a grin and blew out his cheeks.

"Got a customhouse already, eh, all ready to skin us alive?"

But immediately then he was dissatisfied. Heels higher than his head once more, down he came meddling.

"Not there. Over here at the *left* of the dock it stands, like so. The *street* goes up from *there*."

Either he was difficult or I was dumb. I had no

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more than started to make a furrow with my thumb where he said the street was, when you would thought I was doing a crime, so roughly did he push me out.

"Broad!" He used the whole heel of his hand up the steep earth. "Wide and stinky." He cherished a file of sickly weeds. "Mahogany trees, poincianas, and silk-cottons. The black midges are hellishing all along under there. And here she bears sharp to the port hand; and here, look-a-here, it's the same as steps, she climbs so fast. And here at the turn——" He pawed behind him among the débris on the heights till he found a block. "Here's Papa Jacobi's. Know Papa Jacobi's, son?" Elbows dug in the earth, the ranchman recollected. "It's a chandlery for one thing; it's a corner grocery; it's a bar; it's a sailor's post office, and a dancing hall. And next door, here, there's a Chinaman; and here's the church and the priest's house. And here's the square with the well, where the girls bring their pitchers, and Gaff Bjorkman put a head on the soldier. And here's the benches where the old boys loaf, under the peppers, yarning till there's no end."

Swiftly from there, this way, that, zigzag, the street climbed. And suddenly, where it came out of the shadow cast by the heights beyond the harbor and into sunlight, there was another building set by magic, as big as a four-inch butt of unplanned two-by-four. And as suddenly, by another magic, I saw it had flagstones like a piazza before it, and iron tables and iron chairs,

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and above these a trellis, and over the trellis a vine sprawling, throwing shadow patterns, swollen flowers, wispy leaves.

Above that, then, there sprang a second building thrice as big. A high, blank, whited wall was all I could make of that, and up this wall the line of dusk crept, racing. Yes, just that. Already, between one breath and another, the bank's shadow had overtaken the house with the trellis, and before my eyes it swallowed the one that was like a convent or a monastery. There in the city of inches the sun was setting in vivid miniature, and the dusk that ran up over the steep, wild, flower-hung port was as wide as the night of the world to me.

I do not know whether the ones I saw come rolling up that road were the same that Coffin saw; they hardly would be. But one of mine had a wooden leg, and one a hook for a hand, and one tall fellow built like a slab had two hearts tattooed on his bare right forearm, a blue one over a red one, and through both the scar of a knife wound that had pinned them together, I wonder if by chance. And all of them sang in a windy basso, things about "Rio" and about dead men and bottles of rum.

Rum they drank. Or wine they drank, lolling in the iron chairs, their elbows on the iron tables, from which the dusk had chased the flower shadows. Ale, brandy, Canary, Hollands, port. What they drank I cannot say. They ate queer fabulous fruits that the

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brown-skinned women brought them, mangoes, custard apples, avocado pears. At least I think they did. There were dishes of stewed kid hot with peppers, I believe. And I know for sure they had cakes fried in oil, as thin as paper and as sweet as honey.

"As thin as paper," my strange alfalfa farmer played with his own words, rapt, waving his long legs against the sky. "And sweet as honey in the comb."

Far away and below in the bottom of the darkening harbor there is a confusion of faint sounds, creak of cases, thud of bales, boom of puncheons, where they are still heaving the cargo out of the hold of that ship of ours at dock. Mid-distant, other sounds, strange birds, laughter, an accordion, a guitar. The brown women are putting lamps in the glassless windows.

But above, beyond a thornbrake, a thinner, cooler light falls on the whitewashed wall without windows, and that is the light of the moon. But I have been mistaken. There is a shadow on the wall, the shadow of a sea rover with hearts on his arm, six feet and better in his boots, built like a slab. From his shadow another goes on up, narrow and rectangular, and that is a deep window full of darkness and barred with bars.

"What have they got you here for, my lovely? What's your name, my love?" The man's voice is wheedling, caressing. "Why don't you speak? Don't be scared of me. Can't you speak? Yes, but speak white, talk Christian, so I can understand. 'O, *mari-*

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nero, marinero!" That all you can say? That won't tell me what's your name, what's your trouble, or how old you are? Damn, can't you tell me that much, even, by counting on these soft, white, silky little fingers I've got of yours?"

So there are hands in the dark between the bars. Never have I seen such hands again, so slim, so pale, so yearning.

"*'Marinero, marinero.'*" Sure. But can't your sweet red lips say anything but that? Can't your big black eyes look anything else but 'O sailor, sailor!', so breathless, so scared, so sad?"

So there is a face in the dark behind the bars. Never have I seen such a face again, so heartbreaking in the tender oval of its beauty, so mysterious, so tragical, so pure in the sudden whiteness of the lightning, so young beyond the veil of the rain.

Rain? Lightning? Where is the moon? But after all, what's weather? What's time in the enchanted city of make-believe? Whether it's another night, another week, or another year?

"*'Marinero, marinero?'*" Yes, your sailor's here."

Again the lightning cuts from cliff to cliff. The great pit full of houses and tree tops, water and ships, is blacker after it. Down rolls the thunder like the tumbling of an empty cask. Down the wall rolls the rain.

"I can't see you, sweetheart, it's so dark. Where's your hands? Your lips? Damn these bars! Stand

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clear a second. Give me a hold on 'em. If I part the hands from my arms, I'll fetch 'em out, and the stone with 'em, and the whole damnation wall. And then we'll run. Run, you and me; you hear? What? '*O marinero!*' O sailor, sailor! So, that's why, is it—why you say it so scared and so sad? No, don't you worry, I'd never leave you. I'm done with voyaging for good and all. Where we'll go, you and me, is a thousand miles from the rotten salt. What we'll do, we'll get us a farm, a snug little place with cows and pigs and hens, and a tight little house, and you and me, like I've always wanted, away quiet inland, where I'll never have to set a top or pump bilge or eat maggots any more. . . . Tight, eh? I'm drunk, you say? Now listen, pretty barmaid, put your blue eyes into this mug. Think a mug of beer that size could make me drunk on a cold night like this? So if you won't give me a kiss, give me another pint, while I tell you. . . ."

A cold night like this? Pretty barmaid? But what's time, what's temperature, what's geography, what's sense, on the coasts of remembrance?

Where is the rain? The rain is there, over the slate roof and spattering on Cornish cobbles outside the public-house door, half sleet. Where are the fruity perfumes of the tropic seaport night? Blown away before the nose-pinching wind from a thousand Dickens chimney pots with Kingsley sweeps in half of them.

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And the girl behind the bars? Gay pun! A girl behind a bar.

Never shall I see the like of that girl again, so entrancing in the red and white of her, so merry with her lips, so valiant with the blue-green eyes that have twin shadows in them, one of wisdom and one of wist. So beset in this loudness and beleaguered in this reek of men, yet so inviolate.

“ ‘Sailor,’ you say? ‘Sailor, sailor,’ you say, you’ve heard that guff before? Well, I’ll tell you something; if you can’t see the God’s truth when you look a man between the eyes —— No, hell, look at me! When I’ve hunted the world three times around to find a love like you, you’ll leave those scabby lime-suckers wait a minute; you’ll listen to me. Think I’m a boy, sweetheart, I don’t know when I’m in love? Sailor? Hellnation, no! I’m done with sailing, and that’s sure. You come with me, and where we’ll go we’ll go a thousand miles from the rotten salt. What we’ll do, we’ll get a little farm, with cows and pigs and hens —— Sheer off o’ me, you big bum you! Who you think you’re shoving? *What?* You want a mouth put on to you big enough to suck a dozen limes at once? Yow! Swallow that! Wow! And that one! Guh! Kickin’, eh? Knives, eh, now, you dirty Italians! You lousy Turks! Take a bite of the broken end of this bottle, and see how —— *God!*”

Where’s the bar? Where’s the maid? Where are the lights?

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Where is any light at all? Where are we trying to slop and stumble to? What are we cursing and groaning for?

"Where we going, mister?"

"Down to the vessel. Down to the river. Down as fast as the devil'll let us. Down!"

What are all these things that come up to hinder us, blind walls to hit us, gutters howling to grab our feet? And what's all that yelling coming down?

"Who's that after us, mister? What they calling to us for?"

But the sailor is heavy with rain and blood. "Get down. Get down and get aboard and beat 'em. Cast off. Go clear." His words are sodden in the rain; the gale blows them away.

All day it has been hot as a furnace on the plain of eastern Colorado, and cool in the mountain valleys to the west. The wind, thin a while ago, has a weight in it now. It rushes down between the iron walls of the Cornish estuary and out to gray the tops of the black Channel swells.

"Come on, son, heave aboard. We'll show 'em. We'll get clean of the stinking land and clear away."

But, "No-no!" I cried of a sudden, fairyland fading and greed coming in. "Looky the wind! Looky the ditch! It'll blow upside down and wreck itself—and that lead on its bottom—— Good-by!"

"Cast off! Shove off! Come about! Pay off! Fill away!"

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"Aw, mister, naw! No foolin'. Listen, can't you hear 'em hollerin' to me? The herd's goin'. I got to go. Gi'me the boat; le'me have it; you don't want it. Oh, mister, le'me take it home: Naw! Catch it—*quick!*"

"There she fills, mate. Down your helm, though. Don't put us *over!*"

"Aw, mister; aw, say! Look what you gone and——"

"Drive, girl! Boil! Boil white water astern of us, and let 'em all go chase themselves. Them and their land that's good for nothing but growing turnips and vegetables on. Who wants to be a turnip? When the whole world's ocean's ahead, and all the ports and sights. Clean of the stinkin' land, by—by ——"

"Now look!"

"—by God!"

For an instant after she capsized in that mid-ditch gust and filled, the sloop's sail remained visible on the water, distended by the air caught beneath. So it circled, the dead plaything of daylight and matter-of-fact, once and once again, before the High Line swallowed it.

I could have wept. I could have howled: "Now see what you gone and done, all for nothin'!" But I dared not. The owner of one of the chasing voices had caught us. Ray Bleeker's face appeared above the bank, half hidden and half framed by the shipwrecked

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ranchman's quiet legs, and all one side of it was carmine with the ray of the declining sun.

"Hey, Dan, get a move!" He was full of bravado, for the other kid's benefit, but ready to duck and put heels to his invisible horse at need. "Looky the time it is. We're startin' the herd home, if you're comin' with us."

Coffin got right end up on the embankment, working his joints as though they all had "cricks" in them. He rolled down his sleeves over the serpents, the anchors, and the red and blue hearts pinned together by a cicatrice. A dark color ran up his cheeks.

"Yes, yes, yes, *yes!*"

The woman had come halfway up through the alfalfa this time. There she stood, submerged to the middle of her inflated wrapper, screeching, like a buoy lifting its note on a bright-green vegetable sea.

The man took his hammer up and hit the neglected spike. The sound of his blows, flat and laggard, came after me only a little way down the hill of prickly pear and buffalo grass; the wind from the mountains was against it. Ahead of me the wind blew the dust of the herd in a red streak to the north and east.

The kids kept at me. "Where you been to? What was he givin' you all that while?"

"He says we should keep out o' his melons, or we'll see."

B U B B L E S

IV

B U B B L E S

CAROL lived in hotels, and her governess was always being mistaken for her mamma. Or it might be her trained nurse or it might be daddy's secretary who was mistaken for her mamma. Most often it was governess. Miss Flower, Miss Runkle, Madame Dunaye, respectively in Nice, on the Isle of Man, and in Deauville, were governesses. But Miss Tolley, in Florida, was daddy's secretary. And Mrs. Kenyon (with long silky legs and an amount of pale-gold hair) was Carol's trained nurse for nearly three months at Capri, though fortunately Carol was not ill a day of the time.

It was a little confusing at first, each time, for in a way they all seemed much alike. One had to remember arbitrarily, that was all, just as one had to remember that whereas two "f's" hitched together make "double-f," two "v's" hitched together make a "double-u." Moreover, Coddie helped her. "Do mind now, child; if anyone's to ask you, Miss Runkle is your governess. *Not* daddy's secretary, this time, but Carol's *governess*." Coddie was severe about this, unnecessarily so it seemed to Carol, upon whom would be lost the glitter of an ironical amusement in the nurse's sea-gray eyes.

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Coddie was middle-aged, and broad, and ate with Carol and not with daddy. No matter who was governess, Coddie did the governing; no matter who was trained nurse, Coddie did the nursing; and even if it happened to be a secretary, it was Coddie who got the letters from the concierge, the commissionaire, or the desk clerk, and arranged them on the table in daddy's room. And beyond all, Coddie was permanent.

It had never occurred to Carol to wonder what would have happened to the world had Coddie not been permanent. Perhaps it had to Mr. Bonaparte. Perhaps that was why he was always so polite to her, poor man, walking lightly among his words with her, as a man (and a little ashamed of it) walking on tiptoe past a sleeping dog.

Mr. Bonaparte was of medium height, well set up, with fair hair and mustache waxed at the points, and blue eyes which had a way of widening abruptly sometimes, like the eyes of some people who suffer from the pangs of unadmitted maladies. At forty-one he had habitually a deep line which, springing from between his eyes, divided into dozens of creases all over his forehead, as fine as threads and as tangled as the hunting of the Wandering Jew. This wasn't always, to be sure. Sometimes his brow was as smooth as a boy's. Such were the times when Carol admired him most, and Coddie, knowing by the signs what was in the air, admired him least of all.

Coddie admired him most when she was seeing him

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most, that is, when there were but the three of them, and Mr. Bonaparte cleaved grimly to the apartment, and grew white of conscience and rumpled of soul and clothing, alternately tender and sharp with Carol, and (for once) defiantly spleenish with Coddie herself, till he was like a lean wolf prowling the windows by day, and by night, in his slippers, the bedroom floor.

Carol admired him most when she was seeing him least. Not for more than scattered minutes in whole days. A "good morning" perhaps, and late in the morning too, after she had been brought back from her walk in Central Park or Kensington Gardens or along the Croisette or the Lido sands, and he still in bed, like all the princes charming of Coddie's tales rolled in one, with his brow smoothed out and an adventurous kindness in his big, blue, far-off eyes. And after that only in chance glimpses—daddy in the distance in High Street helping a lady into a motor car—daddy in a vista of the Casino gardens at tea with a lady under a striped umbrella—or after the lights were lit and Carol in her bed, a blur of daddy in the hallway in shining black and white and tails.

Oh, how splendid he was! It was queer: Carol was proud and jealous all in one. She wished she were dying, so he couldn't go but must stay and be distracted about her. Yet just as fiercely she wanted him to go—out where the clustered lights were and the admiring throngs. "Do look: who *is* that wonderful *man*?" . . . "But don't you know? You know the girl with

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the red-brown curls and the green jacket and gaiters—well, *that's her father!*” Between the two wants she wept, and often she would be asleep before she could make up her mind which one she was mostly weeping for. . . . And presently, one day, “I shouldn’t be surprised,” she would confide to Coddie, “if daddy were looking out for somebody for me—like a governess.”

Why did Coddie make it sound so odd when she echoed, “I shouldn’t be surprised.”

So they weren’t surprised when the trunks appeared in the rooms, and when daddy, as if he had been on the point of forgetting to mention it, called back from the door on his way to luncheon, “By the way, might just pack things up, you know; we’re leaving for the south to-morrow” (or “for Scotland” or “for America”). Nor were they surprised when, arriving at the station, they found one seat in their compartment occupied by a lady, and the lady was Carol’s governess.

Or in America, of course, it would be in the Pullman. That was where Miss Tolley was, in the bright low cave of the two seats and the berth made up above, and porters and other passengers stepping on one’s heels, and daddy with his face pressed to the window as if trying to think what he might have forgotten, while he said in the back of his mouth, “This is Miss Tolley, Carol. Miss Tolley is going to do some secretarial work for daddy down in Florida.”

Miss Tolley was small and dark and quick and she had enthusiasms. She adored things. She adored the

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sea. She spent lots of time at Miami on the beach in an old-rose bathing costume, but she never went into the water. Coddie had funny ways of saying things to herself aloud. Later on she said to herself that daddy had "let the Tolley go" for just that—that she "never went into the water." . . . Miss Tolley liked perfumes.

Mrs. Kenyon did not like perfumes. She liked black coffee, black cigarettes, black Italian shawls, which was interesting, since she was so distinctly un-black herself, but all creamy and pale gold in the hot white Capri sun.

They were all different in little ways. Madame Dunaye disliked anything flavored with pistachio and wore a ribbon across her forehead to make it look wide and low, and she and daddy went to the races.

Miss Flower was an English girl. Sometimes she grew red and at other times she cried. At the Manx Arms, where she was with them, she asked Coddie to let her have one of Carol's lesson books, and sometimes when people looked at her she would come and get Carol, and they would sit in the gardens and read together, much to Coddie's amusement later on. Miss Flower wouldn't go near the water (though it wasn't like Miss Tolley—it was sadder). On the steamer all the way across to New York she would hardly look at the waves, and unless she was tramping the deck with daddy she was always hidden away somewhere inside, alone. Carol asked her why. Then she told Carol:

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"My father and my two brothers were fishermen. They were all lost at sea."

One night Miss Flower stole into the stateroom while Coddie was out. She got on her knees by Carol's berth and put her face in the blankets and sobbed. "Is it because you are frightened of being drowned?" Carol asked her.

Miss Flower was a slow, big, hale person, and there was a silk of down on the arms she flung around Carol suddenly, without a word.

"Or why then?" Carol persisted, feeling puzzled and responsible.

"Nothing! Nothing! Except that I—I—I *wish you were mine!*"

That's an odd kind of a governess.

Miss Flower wept too at the High Ridge House in the White Mountains. One night she wept nearly all night long. It must have been over something she and daddy were discussing late, for she was in daddy's room, where Carol could hear her sobbing. She could hear daddy too. Once she heard distinctly what he said. "You've got to be quieter, I *beg* of you, Clare! Good God! this isn't the Continent, remember—this is America." And once he too sobbed.

He took Carol for a long tramp next day. When they got back home to the High Ridge House Miss Flower was gone.

Times like that—just when someone was gone, and before daddy had begun to grow fidgetty—were the

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times above all that Carol loved. It didn't mean just the one tramp. There were dozens. Up hill and down dale, hand in hand, woods like Persian rugs where autumn was commencing, little clouds in the clear, and blue shadow splashes; boot nails ringing on the rocks, daddy in rough tweeds, a big brown pipe going, instead of so many cigarettes.

There was a hillside facing the sun, a field running down to a pine forest that, in its turn, ran down into a shining river. There was the ruin of a house, and on an outer corner of the old foundation they sat and let their legs hang over. And Carol began to feel queer.

"Old Girl," daddy was saying, "what are you going to remember about your dad? Whatever do you suppose you think you really think of him?"

Think? Oh, she couldn't *think*. Somehow, the way she loved him—the way she was thrilled by his bigness and kindness and handsome strength, so that sometimes she was almost scared to know that he was there with her, undivided, monopolized—somehow or other, it was more than she cared to tackle in words. There are times in the heart of woman when lightness is the only way out.

"I like," she said (though she was feeling queerer all the while) "the way your mustache does at the ends, like the lances knights level at dastard cravens." She squeezed his hand to make him understand this was whimsicality. "And I like the way this suit smells."

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Daddy burst out laughing, twisting still tighter the mustache ends. "Ah, woman, woman!"

But then he stopped and his face grew red. After that it turned a greeny white, like the faces one sees in deck chairs. For a while he sat and hugged his knees. So he hadn't understood after all.

He said, "Old Girl, daddy needs something. Daddy needs people. Daddy's not much good in this world without—somebody."

Oh, but couldn't he *see*? Idiot! there were tear drops in his eyes.

But now Carol was feeling queerer than ever.

"Daddy," she said before she knew it, "have we ever been here before?"

"Here?" He stared at her, blinking. "No!" Then he looked down the pasture to the woods and river, and gave a sort of start. "I see what you mean."

If he saw what she meant, certainly Carol didn't.

"Daddy, listen to me. Was I ever—did I ever have a mamma?"

Daddy kept on looking steadily at the river. "By George, I see what you mean," he repeated to himself. He slid from the wall and put his hands up. "Come, jump." But *her* face was the funny color now. "Lord!" he said, "what's wrong? Tummy?"

That was it. Presently she was ill-and-up-with-it in a corner of the wall.

They laughed over it as they tramped back across the world. "What a silly thing to do!" . . . "What

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a perfectly!" Yet it was a little because they felt they had to. There was a change. That was the last of their walks just then.

Daddy went under again. Anyone could see how vilely he hated to. The looks he gave Carol sometimes! It was as if he were a wolf in a forest, but the forest was enchanted, and even while he prowled and growled his horriddest he was all the while trying to tell one with his dumb eyes that he wasn't really a wolf at all but a prince under the spell of an evil sorcerer.

It was growing late in the season and the hotel was nearly empty, and there was nothing but the hotel in miles. Carol and Coddie discussed governesses.

"He'll hardly find one *here*," Carol decided, and Coddie concurred.

Bored! How bored daddy was! Not just yawning bored. It was a more positive thing; more like a disease he had to fight, and tried to fight, sometimes angrily and sometimes in dull despair. His trousers bagged at the knees and the ends of his mustache came undone. The hotel followed his mood; servants were laid off; the wooden corridors sounded hollower and hollower.

Then one morning Coddie, bringing up the mail, said to Carol, "Here they are." She meant the folders. Cunard, White Star, United Fruit, Royal Mail. Carol looked them over superficially, then turned to the

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letters, which it was her privilege to sort, Mr. Bonaparte's from Miss Eliza Codd's.

"Here's one for daddy from someone who's a doctor and who's at home. 'Doctor Kamp's Home!' Now isn't that too silly to put on the outside?"

Coddie was surprisingly impressed. Snatching the letter from Carol's hand and hiding it behind her, she hardened her eyes at the girl as though it were a crime she had been caught in. And within two minutes after she had taken the mail into daddy's room, here was daddy out in his pajamas.

"Codd, I want you to get the trunks packed immediately. I've this letter from——" He hesitated, more and more distracted. "Carol, Old Girl, will you run along down and play on the veranda for a while? Dash!"

Carol played on the veranda for a while, but she had nothing to play with and a while is rather indefinite. Returning to the rooms she heard Coddie saying, "Yes, Mr. Bonaparte, we're both right: *I would hardly* do."

And daddy, at his wit's end, "Well, how to manage? I suppose my best plan would be to wire the agency to send somebody down direct to 'The Pasture.'"

Carol felt things a good deal more than she knew things. She could feel a shadow coming before she could see it. All the way to the station in the hotel car that afternoon—she didn't know why—but it was

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dreadful. What made her cling so hard to Coddie's hand? And why was Coddie, who hadn't a cold, forever blowing her nose on the sly?

Why was it so queer when they got into the parlor car? There was no new governess there, but that wasn't the half, nor the hundredth. It happened just before the train started to move. Coddie bent of a sudden, dabbed a kiss on Carol's temple, cried, "Be a good girl, now, always," and in another wink there she was outside on the platform, waving, and the landscape was sliding, and daddy and Carol were awkwardly all alone. . . .

It was late at night and it was a strange house, a strange room and a strange bed. Strangest of all was the getting to bed. The only one there was to preside over it was daddy (there were servants of sorts in the strange downstairs, but of course *they* wouldn't do), and daddy was bungling and distraught, and Carol was inept and distraught, and the whole affair was getting to be a dream which she wished she didn't have to have.

How could she ask where such a thing as her nighty was, when she couldn't ask where Coddie was? In ways it was quite as hard for daddy. With him it took the form of an embarrassment which grew with the child's numbness and dumbness, till it seemed he would have to yell and shake her if she persisted in it ten minutes more. This going on as if nothing had happened!

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He did shake her presently, and gave her a fumbling kiss on top of her head, so that she couldn't see his face.

"Don't know what it's all about, do you, Old Girl? You'll be so happy, though, when you know the surprise."

"When is the surprise?" Her voice was as dead as dead.

"To-morrow."

"Is it Coddie?"

Daddy looked worse than exasperated: he looked hurt. Painstakingly, like one counting twenty before he spoke, he turned down the bed. Then he stared at the farther wall and said, "You're getting too old for simply a nurse now, Carol. To-morrow your regular governess will be here."

"Oh-h-h-h!"

Carol got in, pulled the covers to her chin, and lay quiet, studying him as he bent in circles picking up things that didn't need picking up.

"Oh-h-h-h! So-o-o-o! I see-e-e-e!"

Daddy jerked up, his face flaming.

"No, you *don't* see. And it's a *real* surprise—and can't you take daddy's word for it—and not look like that—and—go to sleep like a good girl?"

He rushed around. "Want a drink of water on your table? No?"

He vanished, and presently he was back again in

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triumph, bearing a kitten captured somewhere, a gray little creature with fluffy cheeks and pert eyes.

"Look! Isn't it cunning? Want to pet?"

"No, thank you."

Unfortunately the kitten had taken matters into its own paws. No sooner had daddy put it beside the pillow than it was gone under the covers, and no sooner was it curled in a lump on Carol's chest than it began to purr.

Carol would do nothing about it. Daddy stood and scratched his head.

"Well, I don't suppose it's at all the right thing. However—just to-night——" He sighed, opened the window, put out the light, and fled.

Carol lay and stared into the dark. "So-o-o-o. I see-e-e-e."

The first sob was hard to get up, the second was easier, and then the wild tears came. The ball in her arms wriggled in protest, not liking to be hugged so joltingly. . . . There, that was better.

Not since she could remember had Carol been in one place long enough to be allowed to have a pet. Kittens were amazingly soft and warm. As little by little the sobbing wore itself out, so did the purring. Neither kittens nor kids can stay awake forever.

Carol had a start when she awoke in the morning. It came back with a thump: "*Coddie isn't here.*" Then, hearing someone in the room, she turned her

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head, and for a wink she thought it was Coddie. The same square figure, a broad back, a head with a top-knot. But when the person turned it was a stranger.

Her name, she said, was Mrs. Lepphant and, although it wasn't her fault Carol had mistaken her for Coddie, Carol hated her. It didn't help that Coddie would have cried, "*A kitten in bed!*" and flung up her hands in just as holy a horror; no, somehow or other it wouldn't have been the same. Nor would her "Up you get now, Carol: don't be a lazy thing!"

The thing that was hardest to bear, as Carol went about her dressing with averted eyes and heavy hands, was that daddy had told her a deliberate fib. "Too old for simply a nurse now." If that wasn't to say she wasn't to have a new nurse in poor Coddie's place, she didn't know what it was. Of course it never occurred to her that Mrs. Lepphant might be the governess he had spoken of. Governesses don't have red wrists and grizzling hair; if Carol knew anything in the world at going-on-seven, she knew *governesses*.

When Carol looked out of her window she had another start. Last night, whirling up in the car, it had all been dark. Now the sunshine of the clear morning discovered to her eyes an oblique and rocky pasture-land falling away to a pine wood, and at the foot of the wood the broad Connecticut.

"Come along to your breakfast, child; don't be lagging there."

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Carol had felt queer once before. Was she going to have a "tummy" again?

Mrs. Lephant came treading back. There would need to be some discipline.

"Did you hear me, Carol, when I—— Why, what ails the child?"

"Mrs. Lephant, I've been here before."

"Been here before? Gracious! It's your home, isn't it?"

"My—home?"

"I thought your papa told me you were born here. . . . Now whatever the game is, please leave it till after breakfast, my dear, and take my hand and come."

At breakfast, after a long time, Carol asked, "Where is my daddy?"

"He has gone out for a while. He didn't say when he would be back."

"Oh-h-h!" (It was true about the governess's coming then.) "I see-e-e."

That day of waiting was long and it was short. It was long on account of Coddie, who wasn't there, and of Mrs. Lephant, who was. It was short on account of the diverting way in which each new thing about the place was at very first glance familiar, and then, as soon as Carol had time to think about it, strange. And also on account of the kitten, whose name, the cook said, was Bubble.

Bubble was an irresponsible creature. It's the way of the world. Impetuously loved, profoundly de-

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pended upon, she seemed to take a perverse delight in maintaining her own poise and doing as she sweetly pleased. Here one moment, rubbing an arched back, cleaving softly, purring like incipient volcanoes and brightening the sun—another moment and Bubble was no more. Run here and call there as Carol might, with panic growing in her, Bubble was gone. Gone like Coddie and, perhaps, like Coddie, never to come again.

It wasn't until after lunch (still no daddy) that Carol discovered the wile of triumph. It might be a twig, but better it was a string with a crumple of paper tied at the end. Bubble was gone, was she? Forever! Well, then, forget Bubble! Go about your business doing as *you* sweetly please. Prowl, explore. Craning at the eaves high overhead, where, in and out of the gingerbread frettings, birds wheeled with tiny whistling sounds, wonder what it can be that makes the heart stop, trying to remember—what? Or all of a sudden, scouting along a path between high barberry walls, *know* that there is a gravelly circle and a bird-bath at the farther end of it, and begin to run—and plop! Tug!—there's Bubble, dropped from heaven, battling at the crumple of paper dragging quite forgotten in the rear, as if Bubble had never been away.

Once it was nearly disastrous. On the side toward the valley the garden was built up, the stone wall of the terrace falling away ten feet at least to the pasture's rocky ground. It was just here that the kitten

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exploded from a clump of rhododendrons, and Carol, turning her eyes at the tug, saw the gray fluff teetering after the paper along the giddy edge, at a perilous balance and apt at any breath to lose it and go tumbling away to break her neck.

Carol stopped, her heart stopped, her hand froze. Prickles climbed her spine. She was afraid to breathe, but she had to breathe to whisper:

"Mrs. Lepphant—where are you?"

"I'm right here, child. Why?"

"Call Bubble a-a-way fr-from there. G-g-get another string and dr-dr-drag it—Oh, she *will* fall off!"

Mrs. Lepphant dared disaster by laughing out loud. "Why, my dear child, *cats* don't fall. They never do. And even if they did—See!"

With a swoop almost as quick as a cat's Mrs. Lepphant caught Bubble by the scruff and held her at arm's length, squirming in terror of the abyss. Then leaning down and out over it, before Carol could so much as gasp, she had opened her fingers and let the kitten fall.

"There, you see? It doesn't matter how a cat is dropped, it *always* lands right side up. See, though! Why, Carol! don't look at me so!"

Carol hazarded one eye over. When she saw that Bubble wasn't dead, but bouncing off along the foot of the wall with a tail as big as indignation, she stopped being faint. She sprang up. She towered, pink with fury.

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"Mrs. Lephant, I want you to know right square now I think you're a—a ——"

But she was a well-brought-up girl, and it does tell. Appalled, she wheeled and ran as fast as she could run away. Mrs. Lephant called after her but Carol would have cut off her ears before they would have heard. Tears blinded her, she crashed into plantings, scratched her legs on thorns, and hid in a deep hedge of lilacs, cowering down in the leaf-shadow, so that that woman should never find her till the world's end.

Bubble found her though. Together they thought their thoughts of hate.

Someone was walking on the drive outside the hiding place. When Carol had decided it couldn't be the Lephant she dared one peep. It was a lady.

Something turned over with a flop in the middle of the child's insides. "But I—I *know* her!" But then, as with all the other things, "Do I?" How could she, when she couldn't remember ever having seen her till this day.

The lady's eyes were fixed on the house and she walked like a laggard, perhaps because there were others coming behind. She had slightly wavy chestnut hair, laid back as smoothly as it would go from her temples and over her ears. Her face was pale but it was handsome. By that, and by her slender, prettily clad figure and her silk stockings and high-heeled shoes, Carol knew her of a sudden for what she was. She was the new governess.

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Slowly, still intent on the house before her, she passed out of the spy-gap in the leaves. Daddy moved into it, conversing with a gentleman with black whiskers and a gold-rimmed pince-nez. Coming to a halt just there, daddy's voice dropped to almost nothing. "Doctor," he said, "I want—God knows how deeply I want to thank you. And I hope to Heaven it's going to be ——"

The other coughed, like people who are embarrassed by being thanked.

"I hope so, too. And, Bonaparte, I believe so. I shouldn't have written you unless, by every test I know, I'd been convinced."

"Well?" Daddy's eyes went after the vanished governess. He now seemed the embarrassed one. "Well, Doctor—you won't stay, eh? Overnight?"

"I don't think it's best. I'll call you up first thing in the morning—or better—I'll drop around. Yes, I'll do that. Good-by, Bonaparte. And good luck!"

There was the sound of a motor near at hand getting up its appetite. Both men blew their noses. Carol slid out the other way, quiet as an Indian, and made for the farthest corner, where was the house that held the garden tools.

Governesses were always bad enough. But *this* one! And daddy blowing his nose with strangers! And Mrs. Lephan! "Bubble!" she wailed, "where, oh where is Coddie gone?"

But before Bubble could even begin to answer, a

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shadow around the toolhouse corner was followed by the hurrying Lephant in the flesh.

"Where *have* you been, child? Come along directly and see your mamma."

Carol was so flustered that she did go along, suffering tugs at her frock here and dabs at her hair there, and had got almost to the steps of the veranda before her reason came back. Then she balked. Escaping Mrs. Lephant's hand, she stood off and looked at her from beneath wise brows, precisely as Coddie might have done it, with a nipped-in, faintly alkaline smile.

"But you see, Mrs. Lephant, it *isn't* my mamma. People are *always* making just exactly mistakes like that."

When even daddy assured Carol that it was her mamma, and when the lady herself, waiting near the mantle in the big double-bayed living room, stretched out her arms a little stiffly, as if it hurt her, and was nothing of a sudden but hands and two huge dark eyes, it was more than Carol could deal with on such short notice. She felt like a stick and she acted like a stick.

It was an idea to be gone at slowly. It's doubtful if even Atlas could lift a new world without working up to it. Perhaps the lady didn't realize.

If only Coddie could have been there. Thank Heaven! Bubble was . . .

It would have been easier if they could all have settled down to it quietly; simply have taken three big

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easy-chairs there in the living room, and sat, and sat, and looked one another over, as much as to say, "Well, now, let's see." But they couldn't. None of them seemed to be able to stay still. First it was outdoors to look at the plantings; then it was upstairs, going through the chambers; then out again to look at the sunset beyond the hills.

Daddy was the worst in a way. When he wasn't breathing very hard, he wasn't breathing at all; when he wasn't going red he was just getting over being red. It was worse than governesses had ever been—he was so anxious that everything should be precisely right for mamma—now a footstool for her feet; now a hand to help her over an inch-high culvert in the garden walk; again a, "Shan't I run bring you out a scarf, Stacia?" or a "Come, dear, sit down for a moment and rest." His blue eyes, always a little helpless, seemed permanently dilated, as one's eyes will be when there's a gun that may go off any minute or a bubble that may burst. And he talked a lot.

Mamma was quite different. Her quietude (even though she was forever on the move) was extraordinary. It was almost like sleepwalking, it seemed to Carol, and so it startled her, every time mamma took her hand, to find the fingers that closed on hers were as tight as twisted wires and trembling with a slight but very rapid pulse. Carol wished they wouldn't. She wished that the dark brown eyes, whenever they came roving after her, wouldn't turn so abruptly and

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so inkily black. It made her shy, and the thing she was trying most to do was to get over being shy.

Oh, if only she could act like herself, like the Carol she and daddy and Coddie knew! If only she could charge, arms wide, engulf this mamma in a great hug, and cry passionately as the wonder rushed up from her heart, "I love you, and you're so beautiful, and you're my mamma, and my own, forever and ever—promise me you are!"

But because she was shy she had always to hang back. She had to make believe to be interested in nothing on earth but the kitten that tumbled across the garden at the end of her string. She had to pretend it was secrets, when it was only "She's my own, my really mamma!" that she whispered over and over into Bubble's ear till the creature was nearly frantic with the tickle, and the lovely lady smiled.

It was when they were out for the sunset that mamma smiled. She stopped dead still and flashed a look at the child, knee-deep with Bubble in a thicket of old snapdragon stalks. She started to speak, then closed her lips tight, and wound her fingers into her palms, as people do who are very nervous at hotels in Italy. Then she smiled, and it was a funny, slow, thin smile, and she said in a tone playfully wistful on top and something mysteriously else beneath, "I wish *I* had a string, little daughter. Would you be my little kittie then, and—and—play with me?"

Carol was allowed to stay down to dinner at table

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that evening, and if there had been any doubts left, that would have settled it. One doesn't stay down to dine with governesses.

It was wonderful. There were candles on the table, tall ones, whose fat flames wavered softly in miniature in silver and crystal and china such as Carol had never seen in all the hotels in the world. They wavered in daddy's eyes too, and in mamma's: they must have been in Carol's own; the three faces and mamma's neck and daddy's shirt front were bright, and all was gloom behind.

There was a pale wine in glasses. Daddy lifted his and leaned forward.

"Stacia?"

Mamma was like a lady, Carol decided, sitting in a crystal tower. He had to speak again before she heard and lifted her glass to clink on his.

Daddy's trembled a little. "Here's to—God bless all of us, Stacia."

Mamma sipped and said nothing. When one came to think of it, mamma had said nothing all that afternoon, or nearly nothing. It was always daddy.

"Stacia," he went on, musing at his glass, a twisty smile about his lips that was both sad and gay, "I was never built for—going it alone. I'm not the lone wolf. I feel as if I'd been through——" He shook himself, bright tear drops starting. "Never mind! I feel as if I'd come back to life to-day!"

What mamma felt she didn't say. Dreaming down

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at the fires in her wine glass, perhaps she was thinking of nothing at all as she twirled the stem of it idly in the fingers of her left hand, somnambulist still.

Carol couldn't help bouncing (it was a mercy she didn't gasp out loud) when she felt the *other* hand coming through the darkness under the table. She would have liked to get her own two quickly in safe sight above the cloth, but it was so weird somehow, and she was so confused, she didn't know what to do. And then it was too late; the unseen thing that searched had come to her fingers and slid around them, swift as whips and tight as tentacles.

Carol had never been so abashed in her life. It was really more like terror. Of course it wouldn't have been anything at all if the others at table had known about it. But daddy didn't seem to, and no more did mamma, sitting there above the serene white damask (miles and miles away) in her tower of glass. And it wasn't just that it was clandestine, that subterranean grasp; it wasn't even a grasp, but more like a grab, a static violence, gradually tightening.

"I'm going to do lots of things now, Stacia," daddy was musing. "I'm going to buy back into the firm, and I'm going——" From mamma's face his eyes came abruptly to Carol's. "Why, Carol, Old Girl, what's wrong?"

Carol swallowed, and was red. "N-n-nothing. Really and tr-tr-truly."

In a panic she averted her eyes. She peered busily

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into the shadows in the corners. "Only I—I am a—a little worried about Bub-Bubble. I wonder where Bub-Bub-Bubble is."

There! If only she had thought of that sooner. Under the table the grab had suddenly ungrabbed and flown away, and almost in the same wink of time mamma, come out of her tower, was smoothing with her right hand a wisp of her lovely chestnut hair. She appeared to have rediscovered Carol.

"Bubble is the kitten?" she asked, smiling the same funny, slow, thin smile she had used once before.

Daddy laughed. "Yes, and kittens aren't allowed in dining rooms, Old Girl."

In the living room, after dinner, with Mrs. Lephant waiting rather sniffily in the doorway (for after all, she was a governess, not a nurse), Carol was allowed to bid her parents good night. For the first time in her career and for no known reason, she shook hands gravely with her father. Then she turned with a kind of shiver of stage fright to deal with the other one.

On the flare-backed couch before the new fire in the chimney mamma half reclined, obliquely, one knee over the other, one elbow up and a hand supporting her head, which was tilted a little so, like a bird's in half-preoccupied interrogation. There was a perfume about her that Carol had never known or dreamed of—as if it weren't of earthly flowers—exquisitely faint. Scent and sight worked backward with Carol. A lovely fragrance made her eyes film; to make her

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nostrils dilate it took an entrancing vision, like the soft flames running and playing in mamma's hair.

The eyes in the face that was more beautiful in its set pallor than all the roses in the world were turning blacker and blacker as the seconds ticked. Carol felt herself being intoxicated. In the "V" of Mamma's gown she saw the hollow of the white bosom beginning, and it came to her that what she wanted fiercely was to lay her head there, her cheek and temple, and press tight. On the hidden side of her, lying on the couch in the shadow her crossed knees threw, mamma's other hand was moving. Carol saw it in a corner of her eye, the long fingers coiling and uncoiling restlessly.

"I hope you sleep very well indeed, mamma," she heard herself saying. "Good night, mamma."

But then her feet were glued, not knowing how to go. Bubble saved her. When she saw the kitten cleaving to a table leg and making her eyes green she managed a gasp of joy and skipped.

"Now, child!" Mrs. Lephant called from the doorway.

But Carol had to catch that kitten first. She had to fall on her knees and hug her, kiss her on the whiskers and blow into her ear a "Don't you think she is beautiful, Bubble; don't you think she's darling; don't we love her almost to *death*?" Otherwise she would have had to burst with a rubbery shriek, like an over-blown balloon.

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In the hall Mrs. Lephant said, "Now drop your kitty, that's a good girl."

"Mightn't I have her just a little—just a weency-weency while?"

"Upstairs! What an idea! Bedrooms are no place for animals, not at night. Neither are houses. They're much better off outdoors."

"Oh, but Mrs. Lephant—you—wouldn't. You couldn't! She'd *freeze!*"

"Cats? What do you suppose they've fur for? Let her down; that's right. Scat, kitty; I'll tend to you later. Take Mrs. Lephant's hand now, my dear."

Carol couldn't go to sleep. The tighter she closed her eyes the wider she was awake. A procession of "she's" ramped through her mind. With venomous sarcasm: "She seems to know a great deal about cats!" With a surge of the heart: "She *wanted* me to put my head there in her neck; I *know* she did! She loves me. To-morrow—Oh, to-morrow!" With a guilty, almost forgotten hollow feeling: "I wonder if she has gone to be some other girl's nurse, now I've a mamma and she can't be mine." And with a sudden eye on the window, wide open and blue-green-black and chill: "She *hasn't* enough fur; I don't care! If she *doesn't* freeze, she'll catch her death. Oh, dear!"

It was at the same time ironic and tragic. For the first time with so many responsibilities, for the first time there was no one in reach to share them with. The room grew as big as the house, the house grew

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as empty as the whole black outdoors; the time grew hours.

Then came temptation and the fall.

At first it was creepy, like burglars. No door had been opened, but some one or some thing was in that room. Whether she heard it or simply felt it, she didn't know: she only knew she mustn't stir and mustn't open her eyes.

When she flopped over and popped open her eyes, Bubble said "Prrraouw" from the window sill, where she was busy tidying herself after her trouble with the woodbine by which she had come. Presently, vanishing in lower darkness, she arrived on the bed with a thump.

Carol was firm. "You wicked! You heard what Mrs. Lephant said as well as I did." Bubble rubbed, filling the lecturer's face with fluff. Carol sat bolt up for authority. As she did so Bubble took advantage of the lifted coverlet, dived beneath, whipped into a fat knot, and began to purr.

Carol sat and thought.

"Mrs. Lephant thinks she knows everything, but she doesn't know as much as daddy. She says Bubble shouldn't be here, but last night daddy said——"

She curled back into the warm place under the covers and got hold of the kitten. Thinking of that window (it's much more dangerous to go down vines than up them—and no matter what Mrs. Lephant thought

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she knew about cats), she got still better hold, her arms double all the way around.

It was the light that awakened her, falling through an open door. She would have said it must be nearly morning, but it wasn't, for daddy and mamma were just coming up to bed. Daddy was in the doorway and mamma was near the bed.

"Is she sleeping?" daddy asked in a low voice.

"I don't know." It was hardly above a whisper, in case. "Carol, dear?"

Carol, peering through sleepy lashes at her there, felt all the things she had felt in the whole of the day in one lump now, and the lump was in her throat. There was something that ravished her in that silhouette of a mother, the shoulders bent a little and the head held still, like hovering. Carol needn't wait till to-morrow after all to fling up and cry, "Mamma! I love you, and I'm glad."

She would have done it that moment, had something dreadful not occurred. She wasn't the only one awakened. Bubble stretched under the bedclothes and began automatically to purr. It rumbled, nothing less.

There was no time to plan. Carol opened her mouth and snored. She never snored; she didn't even know how to snore; but she snored.

Mamma hadn't moved. Or if she had, it was only her neck and head, by a fraction of an inch, and so swiftly that nobody would have known. Like an

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Indian in the dark when his brother touches him for "Did you hear?"

Had she heard? Carol snored in despair. Oh, *had* she heard?

Daddy reiterated his question from the door, but with another emphasis, of mirth: "*Is she sleeping?*"

"One would think so, wouldn't one?"

Mamma turned like a shadow, stiffly but without a sound, and moved away toward the bright rectangle where daddy was waiting, one arm crooked out and a smile trembling about his lips and eyes.

The door was closed and it was dark again. Thank Heaven, Bubble Bonaparte! They were both young in crime yet, and it had been a pretty narrow squeak.

It was late when Carol awoke in the morning; it wasn't indeed until Mrs. Lephant came; and it was a clear warm day full of sun. Still blinking, Carol pawed about under the covers. Then she lay suddenly as still as scared mice and studied Mrs. Lephant out of the corners of her eyes.

"Mrs. Lephant," she began in a small voice, when the woman wouldn't stop her bustling and wouldn't end the suspense by opening her mouth (providing, of course, that she *knew*).

"Yes, child, what is it? Why don't you get up as I told you?"

"Mrs. Le-Lephant, you—you didn't—you haven't seen anything of my—of Bubble—this morning?"

Through Heaven

"If you're still talking about that cat, no, I haven't. And now if I have to speak again——"

But Carol had to lie one more moment, staring at that open window. "The little monkey!" she thought to herself with what tried to be amusement.

She was wild to get out of doors. Tugging at the monitor's hand on the way down to breakfast she attempted stratagems. "I don't seem to be very hungry this morning, Mrs. Lephant. Must I eat breakfast, please?"

She wouldn't take even the Lephant's look for answer, but appealed from it to daddy, who was just getting up from his coffee and eggs. Daddy laughed. "You sit down there and cram!"

"Where's mamma?" Carol inquired in a smaller tone.

"Not up yet, the lazy. I'm sending her a tray; imagine that!" He was full of animation. All his motions were big, even the way he filled his pipe. "This is the life! eh, Old Girl! Now gobble. It's no day to be inside."

Carol got a piece of string from the maid and a piece of paper from a basket and set forth. She tried the east side of the grounds. "Kittikittikitti——" She combed the cover as far as the toolhouse there and cast back along the front hedge toward the drive, bare-headed in the sunshine. Daddy stood talking with the doctor of yesterday.

"A bit nervous and quiet last evening—but she slept

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like an angel, Doctor, and this morning she looks like one. Doctor—I think it's a go."

Failing in the east, Carol trailed her bait into the south, the back-yard region, where the land began to slope and the outbuildings were. She didn't go to the valley side till the last. She wouldn't, that was all.

She didn't make a sound for a full half minute after her eyes had found Bubble in the long grass. But when she did, it brought daddy around the corner at the double, and the doctor behind.

"What is it, Carol? Oh, I see. Oh, poor kitty! *Isn't that a shame!*"

"The old *fool!*"

It rasped Carol's throat. It was rage. Grief hadn't had time as yet.

Daddy stared at her. "Who's a fool?"

"Mrs. Lephant. She is! She t-t-told me a k-k-kit-ten couldn't hurt itself f-f-falling."

"Where'd Bubble fall from?" Daddy craned up. "That your window there?"

Now the sobs began to rack and the tears to roll.

"It wasn't Bu-Bu-Bubble's fault. She came to bed with me—but—bu-but *I* let her st-stay. And of course she wanted to g-g-get up early—and the doors were sh-shut—and she sl-sl-slipped on the v-v-vine and—Oh, daddy!"

Daddy caught her up in his arms. His attention, though, was curiously divided, more than half of it still fixed on the gray little body in the grass.

Through Heaven

"It's odd," he mused, "but I didn't suppose, myself ——" He spoke aloud to the doctor, who had bent to prod with a professional finger. "Neck broken, is it?"

"Broken, yes." The doctor snapped his own neck back of a sudden to look up at Carol's window, but nothing was there. "Broken, yes." His lips moved in a funny way. "I'm afraid a little worse than broken, Bonaparte. *Wrung.*"

Somewhere aloft some one was laughing. It was low but unmuffled and pure, wandering, softly jubiling, soliloquizing, a little sarabande of mirth.

Carol couldn't help it, she shook her hands at the high windows. "Mamma, no! . . . Oh, daddy, but poor mamma, she won't laugh when we—when we t-t-tell her—that."

Daddy, getting his face in another direction, carried Carol away, while the doctor lingered a moment to break a bit of brush down over the place where Bubble lay. . . .

If yesterday had been upsetting, it was as nothing to to-day. Carol was too prostrate with woe even to try to make it all out. Trunks, bags, boys on bicycles arriving and departing with yellow telegrams, everybody in a hurry, everything in a mess, Mrs. Lephant going about with a flounce and a sniffle, mamma still invisible, still a lazy, Carol guessed.

It wasn't till Carol and Daddy were in the station-

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taxi that afternoon that a suspicion of the possible truth came into the child's head.

"Daddy, it wasn't so, after all. I mean, it was all a—a kind of a joke—or I mean a kind of fooling. She *was* a governess, after all?"

Daddy sat and stared at the driver's back. Something distressing had happened to his shoulders between the morning and now. To his color too. It couldn't have been worse if he had been suffering one of his conscientious bored-spells for weeks and months; no, it couldn't have been so bad. It made Carol uneasy. She got hold of his hand.

"She *was* a governess, daddy, *wasn't* she?"

Daddy's gray-looking mouth moved with difficulty. "I suppose we might as well call it—why, yes, Carol, yes. And now—it wasn't long—we'll just forget."

On the platform at the little station, where the train was coming at them with a rush and roar, Carol got hold of his fingers again and tugged.

"Where are we going—this time?"

Daddy stared at the engine. He seemed distraught. He got the question mixed up with the answer he must have meant to give.

"Where are we going," he echoed, "this time?"

A wild wish was trying to dare to spring in Carol's heart. She quit tugging and began to stroke the wooden fingers she held.

"Daddy, couldn't we—Daddy, mightn't we, don't you suppose——"

Through Heaven

But she didn't need to finish. As the coaches rocked by to a grinding halt her eyes had caught a flicker of a face.

Carol shrieked.

"Daddy! Coddie is on this train!"

LUCK

LUCK

“LUCK!”

Without looking at the others, or at the beef-grower, who had pushed his chair back and got up noisily, Jennison removed one cupped hand from the heap of banknotes and began to edge them off with a dampened thumb, counting under his breath. The smoky light in the back room of the mountain store showed him still more unlovely in his diligence, deepening the purplish cast of his pain-ridden face and accentuating the twist of his wry neck.

“Luck!” he repeated, in the same dry tone.

The others fidgeted, coughed, and fooled with the soiled, scattered cards, keeping uneasy eyes on Yaard. The beef-grower had turned back from the doorway, his arms struggling with the armholes of his wine-colored mackinaw. He was a big, young, blond fellow, good-looking, full-blooded, easy-going. But now the stale light showed his face blotched with red.

“Luck!” he cried. “Luck, eh?”

Peters, the storekeeper and peacemaker, got up with an unnecessary clatter and came around the table, bearing a half-empty bottle.

“Yaard, old fellow, have just one before you go,

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that's the man. It'll be cold going over the mountain. Just a small one—to help the sun up? Eh?"

"To hell with that stuff!" The beef-grower ran the back of a wrist over his lips with an unconscious gesture. "I'm looking at that man there!"

Jennison, counting, "Seven hundred and five, seven hundred and fifty-five ——" did not raise his eyes. His studied preoccupation struck deeper into the other's anger. Leaning over a chair back, Yaard brought his fist down on the table top.

"I'll be damned if that four queens over four tens was *luck*. And here's another thing. Take it from me and put it in your pipes and smoke it up, the whole lot of you. There's no such thing in the world as *luck*, and the man's a damned fool that thinks there is. . . . Good night!"

Turning his back on them, he went out, and they heard him blundering through the littered darkness in the front part of the store. Peters, anxious for his goods, followed, catching up a pile of burlap from a barrel beside the door. They heard him calling:

"Oh, Yaard, take care for them apricot cases right in the way there. Wait a second! You forgot your grain bags. Wait a second!"

"God-a-mighty!" he complained, when he came back. "I never can tell if that fellow's had too much or not." His mouth was sour with the night, and he made a face. "And now what's wrong with *you*, Ed?"

Boler, the sawmill man, shook a sad, comical head.

Through Heaven

"You heard that? 'No such thing as luck'? Yaard! Will Yaard! And him the luckiest fool devil that ever drew breath! Luck? Good Mother o' mine! *Luck!*"

The recurrence of the word put them in mind of the one remaining, the silent, wry-necked winner bent over his calculations, and they stopped talking. The awkward silence in the room merged with the wide hush of the mountain night; through it they heard the infinitesimal flaws that made it only the more complete—the fall of a lone pine cone on the crust, the whine of a dog asleep in a shed, the bladelike creak and snap of fibers under the pressure of the frost that comes before dawn. A mile away above the Forks a vixen barked.

Jennison stuffed the folded notes into a hip pocket and got up. He began struggling into his sheepskin reefer with his usual sighs and grimaces of pain. It made everyone uncomfortable.

"Going over the mountain?" asked Peters, who knew well enough.

Jennison gave him a sour look and nodded obliquely.

"If I was you," Tinker advised from the stove corner, "I shouldn't walk too fast goin' over the mountain. It's a narra road for two to travel, Jen, and by the looks of Will Yaard when he left here he wouldn't relish havin' his heels trod on too much this mornin'."

Tinker was Peters' hired man. He was held for

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something of a wit, and made everybody laugh with his solemn drawl.

"Yaard's all right," he went on, "when he's *sober*. And when he 'ain't got a *grudge*."

Boler, who enjoyed this sort of thing, slapped his thigh.

"And a *gun*," he put in. "What Yaard wants to lug that old forty-four around for beats me. Wolves, he says."

"Wolves!" Peters gave a sarcastic laugh and looked at Jennison. "Have you got a gun on you, Jen? You got to remember you're carrying quite a piece o' money, and by the looks of Will Yaard he wasn't more 'n above too certain yet who it belongs to. Got a gun, Jen?"

The storekeeper thought it had gone far enough. He clapped the table.

"Pshaw! Jennison, don't pay 'em any attention!"

Jennison was not even looking their way. He pulled his rat cap over his red, outstanding ears, fished for his mittens, and shook his head with a touch of anger at the other's proffered bottle.

"Come to think of it, though, guess I will," he muttered.

"That's the boy," nodded Peters. "Same to you. I hope you prosper! You busy now, Jennison? Got any fox traps out this year, eh?"

"Oh, a few." Jennison drew his sleeve over his bloodless lips. "Got a couple down near the pond.

Through Heaven

If I feel like it when I come by there I might have a look at them on the way over."

Tinker reached over and tapped Boler on the knee.

"That's where we'll search for him," he advised, in a stage whisper.

Boler struck back at him with a ponderous glee. "Yes sir! We'll have the pond drug. If he don't turn up to home in good time, with the money, you understand, we'll ——"

But Jennison was gone. They heard him, as they had heard Yaard before him, groping through the store, and Peters after him, calling advice and caution.

The storekeeper was out of temper with them when he returned.

"You fellows ought to know better 'n to go on like that," he said. "Good God! as if there wasn't enough bad blood between 'em already."

"Women!" Tinker soliloquized. "If there wasn't any women, now!"

"I guess that's right."

"That's about it, I guess."

They all nodded.

"Judge Proal's daughter, ain't it?"

"Looks so."

"And to think of Jen—with *his* face! And his kind of luck with money! Why, to-night's the first time I ever see money cross Jen's palm the right way yet."

"And you got an idea why—*to-night* ——"

"Now, now, what's the use ——"

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"All right. But to think of *him* looning around a girl like Judge Proal's young un! Dear, dear!"

"Especially with Will Yaard ——"

"Yeh."

Peters yawned. Corking the bottle and tucking it under his arm, he turned to the door.

"I'm going to bed. Let Boler out, Joe, when he begins to feel like going home. Thank God for Sunday. Good night."

And they heard him in his turn making off through the store, and then the sound of his boots, incisive and metallic, on the frosty stair leading to the loft. . . .

It was one of those windless, brittle nights which come sometimes in a mountain winter, when the utter stillness, piling up on itself through the hours, takes on just before dawn an electric quality; the report of a twig popping a quarter mile away comes to the ear undiminished through the clear, magnetic fluid, and a man may be well-near deafened by the crackle of his own footfalls running under him like a slow fusillade of musket fire.

Jennison halted for the second time where the road came in a bend over a little ridge spurring down from the mountain, and remained standing as he was, motionless as the architectural pines flanking him to left and right, his knees bent between steps, the tilt of his head, cocked and thrust forward by the malformation

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of his neck, heightening almost to the point of caricature the attitude of the listener.

He had been quite sure the other time that some one beside himself was moving on the road. What he learned now was that the creaking footsteps were not, as he had imagined, ahead of him, but behind.

Turning around with a half-conscious care to keep his boots from crunching on the snow, he waited, his eyes fastened on the inner wall of the bend, black in the starlight. After a moment a figure detached itself from the pines and came forward, climbing steadily along the blue-gray ribbon of the road. It was Yaard.

Had Jennison been a braver man he would have turned on his heel and walked on with his back to Yaard. As it was he waited, standing quite motionless. When the beef-grower had come to within about ten paces he halted. Whether or not it was because he saw Jennison then for the first time it would be hard to say, just as it would be hard to say whether the gesture with which he shifted the grain bags to his left arm was simply to give the other a rest, or whether it was with the old, half-buried instinct of leaving the right hand free.

For perhaps twenty seconds neither man moved or spoke. In the perfect stillness each could hear the other breathing and see the gray, pear-shaped jets rising from the other's nostrils straight upward in the windless starlight. It was one of those queer, lawless

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moments, one of those dropping-off places in time for which no man can account or be held responsible.

Jennison was the first to stir. "Will—what do you want?"

The beef-grower lifted his right hand suddenly and struck his brow with the flat of his mitten.

"Me?"

He began to laugh, opening his mouth wide and throwing his head back. The charmed silence was broken. His loud, frank laughter ran away through the corridors of the forest and came back indecorously from the faces of hidden rocks.

Jennison felt his face breaking into a profuse perspiration which froze immediately in a gossamer crust on his skin.

"Well, what the hell, then!" he protested, huskily, mopping his forehead with his mitten. "What we standing here for like a—a ——"

"Like a couple of strange dogs," the other supplied. He came forward, stamping his feet and whacking his sides with his elbows. In him the revulsion from melodrama took the form of an exuberant liberation. "Only I didn't know you were ahead of me, that's all," he explained, with another burst of laughter.

They started on, side by side. The first rift appeared in the night. A ghostly effulgence hovered in the zenith and was gone again, and after a moment the woods on the crest to the east showed an edge of grayness, faintly heliotrope.

Through Heaven

As they tramped along, Yaard explained his lagging, and the whole startling trick of transposition became absurdly simple. Coming past the Pitner place at the bottom of the hill he had remembered that he ought to see Pitner, and he had turned up the road to the house.

"Pitner was just getting up," he said. "There's a little piece of money I been owing him for a bunch of calves, and I was figuring to pay up to-day. I wanted him to know I was—was——" He broke off suddenly, his face flushing, and began to whistle "Suwanee River." He shook his shoulders roughly.

"That you were *what?* Go on!" Jennison lagged half a pace behind and watched Yaard's back with an odd fascination. The sweat began to stiffen on his brow once more, and he, too, shook his shoulders roughly, as if struggling with something. He had not wanted to ask the question at all.

A singular thing had happened to them. The long, heavy night, their lungs drowsy with the spent air, their brains alternately sagging and leaping with the recurrent, suppressed excitement of the play and the repeated stimulation of whisky—the abrupt plunge into the outer air, like a plunge into an icy bath—the interval of isolation and utter stillness—the profound nervous shock of that moment when, startled by a trick of time and place, they had found themselves staring into each other's eyes, "like a couple of strange dogs"—by such successive stages had they been stripped,

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unconsciously, piece by piece, of their protective husks, their inhibitions, their spiritual defenses, their mental reserves. And now in the weird hour of dawn they found themselves of a sudden unable to hold their thoughts or curb their tongues. It made them ill at ease. They saw that they were naked, and they were ashamed. They struggled against it. A man drunk will give himself away inevitably; he will say what he always really wants to say, will do what he always really wants to do. These men were drunk with something more than whisky—added to whisky.

"That you were *what?*" asked Jennison. "Go on!"

"That I wasn't able to keep my word about paying him to-day—because I'd gone and lost the money—sitting in a poker game—like a damned fool."

A hunted look came into the other's eyes, mingling with and deepening the expression of fascination.

"It was a run of luck," he muttered, and bit his nether lip.

"And I tell you it wasn't. I was a damned fool to sit with you, and that's settled and done. No, there's no such thing as '*luck*.' A man gets what's coming to him in the long run. Look at me, now."

"Yes, but look at *me!*"

"Look at me, now. They'll tell you I'm lucky. 'That lucky bastard, Will Yaard,' they'll say. But let me tell you the secret ——"

"Yes, yes, but look at *me!*" In his hunger to be heard, Jennison increased his pace by two or three

Through Heaven

short steps, almost like a hopping bird, an illusion still further heightened by the twist of his neck and the eager, inquisitive cock of his head. "Look at *me*, Will! Do you say I ain't *unlucky*? Eh? Eh?"

"No, it ain't unluckiness, Jen. You're always doing fool things, that's all. You're always making fool bargains with your money, or getting drunk and throwing it away. And you're damned lazy, Jen, and you know it. Always were. You'll never get ahead any, never in God's world, and it ain't unluckiness, either."

"I know, Will, I know. But it ain't *that* I'm thinking of. I've never cared a shuck about that, not a shuck. I've never cared much about anything till just lately—not till—till ——"

"Till Hetty Proal came home from seminary with her hair up, eh?"

"I'll tell you the living truth, Will; not till then."

At ordinary times they were ordinary men; wild horses could not have dragged either of them to pronounce the word "love" in the other's hearing, except as personal to a third party, with jeering or mock pity. But now as they walked, climbing higher and higher over the mountain's shoulder into the thin, pale, icy wine of the dawn, a sort of Pentecostal carelessness loosened their tongues, the bars were let down, and their thoughts ran away with them.

"Not till then," Jennison went on, with a fevered eagerness. "I'll tell you the living truth, Will; I love that girl."

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"You do, do you? Why, look at you, Jen! Just look at you! Good Lord! you make a man laugh."

"And then you say I ain't unlucky! You say I ain't unlucky!"

Their voices, unrestrained, incisive, ran away among the trees; a flight of startled snowbirds whirled in the near air; for a moment a fine thread of tone hung over the ridges, the engine's whistle as the "Five-fifty-eight" came sliding into Monk's Falls. Colors—the cold lilac of the sky and snow, the blue of firs, the deep malachite of pines, grew vivid. The world was big with the day.

"You say I ain't unlucky? Look here. I go by the Judge's every day, almost. I'll go five mile out of my way to pass there. I'll go in. She'll ask me in. I'll sit there and I'll look at her. I'll see her smooth, soft, white neck, and I'll see how the brown hair lays light and warm against her cheek, and I'll imagine how it would feel against *my* cheek—my cheek that's never touched the hair of a woman that knew me. I'll sit there and talk. I can talk better than most men, better a good sight than you, Will. I can talk—just so long as she don't look at me. . . ."

"Talk? Good God! Yes. Talk, talk, talk. You can talk!"

It was quite without rancor. Yaard walked at an enormous, free gait, his right arm swinging, his face lifted a little and his eyes on the sky.

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"That's all right, but just the same I'd make her a good husband."

"*Husband?*" The beef-grower laughed loudly without taking his eyes from the waning stars. "*Husband?*"

"All right, all right, but I would. No, maybe I wouldn't make her quite such a good living, but I'd know better what she was thinking of, or worrying about, or such things. I can see different sides of things. And she likes to hear me talk, and I can talk—so long as she don't look at me. But the minute she looks at me ——"

"She laughs?"

"She *don't*! That's a lie! That's a hell of a thing to say! She don't laugh, no, sir. . . . Only when I feel her looking at me I —— Well—you know. . . . And then you got the cheek to say I ain't unlucky. Is it *my* fault I'm like —— Is it any of *my* fault I was born like—*this?*"

"You've made it worse by drinking, that's all I know. And then again, if it ain't your fault yourself, it's the fault of somebody; it's pay for something. It says in the Bible that a man's sins will go down from two to three generations. You look back and I warrant you'll find a foolish act somewheres—your father or your grandfather or someone. No, no, Jen; complain all you want to, only don't lay it to luck; don't lay it to accident. Accidents don't happen. . . . Take *me*, now . . ."

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"Yes," cried Jennison, in a bitter tone. He had almost to run to keep pace with the other's sanguine stride. "Only everything always comes easy for you."

"Take *me*, now. If I need what you call 'luck,' why, I make it. Accidents? Bah! I'd like to see the accident that would keep me from going right on ahead. The whole thing is, I work hard, but not too hard. I use my head, but I don't worry. I'll take a drink, but I don't take too many. I'll do a fool thing, maybe, once in a long while, like to-night; but here's the point—you won't find me doing it *twice*. And so I'll keep on going ahead. Bound to!" He lifted his chin still higher, expanded his chest with a yet deeper draught of the sparkling air. "Bound to!"

The mists of easy-going, workaday self-detraction were swept away; he saw himself for the moment in the naked splendor of dawn.

"You wonder how Hetty's hair would feel against a man's cheek. *I know*. Night before last it laid against mine—when she told me all right—when I asked her if she'd marry me and she told me all right. That's the way with you, Jen—you wonder. That's the way with me—I *know*!"

For a little while there was silence, ruffled only by the swift crunching of the snow in the road. When Jennison spoke his voice sounded thick and rasping, as if it hurt his throat.

"It that true, Will? No fooling, is it true, Will?"

Through Heaven

"God's truth. We'll be married before the month's done."

There was another silence, longer than the last.

"No, I'll be *damned* if you will!"

The beef-grower wheeled, startled not so much by the words as by the abrupt change in distance. Jennison had halted a dozen paces back and stood there staring after him. His eyes were bloodshot, his color livid. His upper lip contracted, showing his teeth.

"What you mean, you'll be damned if we will? What you mean by that, Jen?" And then, with a wave of exasperation, Yaard bawled at him: "Quit it! Quit it! O my God! you're such a baby! Quit looking that way, I say!"

"I'll be *damned* if you will!" Jennison repeated, in the same tone.

Yaard walked back to him, taking long steps. Halting before him, he spread his feet wide and put his fists on his hips.

"Well, then, what you going to do about it?"

For a moment they remained staring fixedly into each other's eyes. The eastern sky was turning green; the poisonous light ran over their set faces. Once again it was the weaker man's glance that fell.

"I don't know. I don't know." His shoulders sagged with a sudden weariness. In a flash of pitiless light he seemed to see himself for the first time as he was. "What can I do? Look at me. I ain't any-

where near as big as you nor as stout as you. And on top of that you've got a gun."

"Oh, *bah!*" Yaard spat loudly in the snow in his disgust. "That's just like you, Jen." Fumbling in his pocket, he drew out the revolver and thrust it roughly into the other's hand, crying: "There you are! Now! There! You got it, man! Now what?"

Jennison's eyes rested heavily on the weapon lying in his palm. Lifting with a slow and horrible fascination, they came to the other's breast, where, under the deep-red stuff of the mackinaw, the heart beat. His sick nerves rebelled. A shudder passed over his frame. His teeth chattered, distorting his words.

"You're lucky, lucky. You know I can't do it. You know as well as I do I can't do it in cold blood, you—you devil, you."

He felt himself stripped, ashamed, degraded. He could not meet Yaard's glance; his hunted eyes ran everywhere. At the foot of a long, gentle, sparsely wooded declivity to the left he saw the pond, its ice gleaming iron gray between the silhouetted poplar boles.

Strange thoughts tumbled slowly through his brain, speculations, fragments of remembered speech. So engrossed was he that the other's outburst came to him only in meaningless dribblets: "—poor snipe—as if *you* could harm *me*—as if you could imagine——" He was thinking to himself instead, "Joe Shultz was up to try the ice for cutting yesterday. Must have

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been just down there, because he told me there was ten inches just off the bend. . . .”

“As if you could imagine,” Yaard was repeating, hoarsely, “that anything *you* could do ——”

“As if I could imagine,” Jennison echoed, hanging his head.

“You poor snipe!”

“Yes, I *am* a poor snipe.”

“You make me sick.” Yaard spat on the snow again, as if to get a taste out of his mouth. “You never *can* carry a thing through.”

“No,” Jennison agreed, in a dreary voice. “I never been able to carry a thing through yet; I know it as well as you do.”

The sight of his moral disintegration was revolting. His knees bent under him; his head lopped over untidily on his twisted neck. One hand began groping feverishly in a hip pocket.

“I can’t,” he groaned. “I can’t even carry through my one run of luck. Take it!” he cried, pushing the roll of banknotes into the other’s hands with a nervous violence. “It’s yours! I—I ——”

“I know,” Yaard put in with a sudden large tranquillity. “I knew all along. That last was too raw; that four queens. You saved three of them out of your full house three hands before. I knew it. But I never worried. I knew I’d get the money back. I knew you couldn’t carry it through. . . . But look

here; I only want what's mine. You got some of your own in here, Jen."

"No, no, no!" Jennison waved a hand in passionate protest. "I don't want part or parcel of it, Will. I won't touch it, Will. It's dirty to me now."

"Don't be a fool!" Yaard's ordinary, expansive good nature had come back. He unrolled the bills with his thumb, counting. "How much Jen? Well, never mind, then; I know."

"I won't, Will! I won't, I tell you!" Jennison almost danced in the ecstasy of refusal.

"There!" Yaard forced a thin sheaf into his hand. "Take it, I say. And now shut up and come on along."

Jennison did not move. For the moment he seemed unable to answer. As he stared down at the money lying limp in his hand a curious look came and went in his eyes. He seemed to shake himself.

"I ain't going on just now," he said. "I got a couple of traps down here by the pond I'd like to have a look at before sunup." He stared thoughtfully at the snow near his feet. "There's a blue fox on the mountain somewheres. Joe Shultz seen it less 'n a week ago. If I could get that fellow! Say, Will, would you mind leaving me take one of them grain bags for a spell? Eh? Thanks. I tell you, if I had the luck to catch that blue one I shouldn't want the whole township knowing it, eh?"

He took the grain bag and folded it over his arm.

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It was a good, stout bag (Yaard took pride in his business and all its physical details), and on one side it bore the black-stenciled legend:

ELM BROOK FARM

Wm Yaard Prop

"Here's your gun," he went on, still looking down slantwise at the snow as he held out the big, clumsy revolver. "But no; wait a second," he reconsidered. "I'll bring it 'round to your place later, if it's all the same, Will. If you don't mind, I'd just as leave have it along, in case that fox ——"

"Fox!" Yaard almost shouted with mirth. "Lord, Jen, you ain't a-scared of a fox!"

Jennison's teeth sank slightly into his lower lip. "No," he said, slowly. "Only them blue ones, you know. I've heard say they ought to be shot in the eye—so 's not to mar the pelt."

"Oh, well, hell!" Yaard waved his arm. "I don't claim to know anything about such things. Go on, take it and welcome. *Keep* the plagued thing if you're a mind to; been trying to throw it away for a year, anyhow. There's no more of them forty-fours hereabouts any longer; can't even get shells any more, without I send away for them. Keep it, keep it; I make you a present."

"Oh no, no! That's all right," the other muttered,

sheepishly. "I'll see you later with it, all right. So long!"

Putting the weapon in the pocket of his reefer, he stepped out of the rutted road into the clean snow downhill. He was not gone, however. He had something yet to say, and, staring hard at the beef-grower's boots, he said it.

"Will, if you don't mind—maybe you'll think it's funny—but I'd be as obliged if you wasn't to say anything about it, about my handing back the money, you know, and all that. I suppose I deserve to be showed up, only, somehow or other—I'd be just as obliged ——"

"Not a word!" cried the other, in good-natured protest. "Not a word, trust me!"

"If you was to say you hadn't met up with me, or seen me, even. If any one asked you—if you was to say you hadn't laid eye on me after you left Peters' place ——"

Yaard cut him off with a wave and an indulgent laugh. "Anything you like, Jen. Not another word. I'll swear on the Bible I never laid eye on you. Now go 'long about your business. So long!"

Filled with a sense of large and beneficent tranquillity, he stood as he was for a moment, watching Jen-nison's laborious progress down the hill. The snow, about a foot deep and crusted not quite thickly enough to bear, made heavy going.

The long labor of dawn was near its end. The

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whole eastern heaven flamed with a pale, cold lemon, against which the farther ridges stood out dark and cold and dead. The poplars fringing the pond, silhouetting more strongly with each passing moment, looked hard and dead, too, each separate stem like an upright bar of iron eaten black with rust. And on the spotless mat of the snow the figure of the walker showed vividly in its every detail, the narrow, uneven shoulders, the grotesque carriage of the neck and head, the awkward posture of the left elbow as he held the grain bag clear of the snow.

"Blue fox, eh? Shoot them in the eye, eh? Sounds just a trifle fishy to me. Now I wonder . . ."

A vague sensation of uneasiness came over him. He shuffled his feet in the snow and told himself he was silly. With a formless impulse he put his hand to his mouth to call after Jennison. And then he took it down again without calling.

Jennison waded on down the gentle slope without once looking back. His feet made hard work, but he was conscious of no fatigue. His face was set and expressionless. He was thinking.

It was as if he had a new brain, in which thoughts came and went with an intoxicating swiftness, a starry clarity. Bits of recollected speech hovered for instants in the clean, new mental firmament:

"As if *you* could harm *me*—you poor snipe ——"

"As if you could imagine that anything *you* could do ——"

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"You never *can* carry anything through, Jen, never ——"

His face remained expressionless, save for a faint satirical twisting at the corners of the lips. His eyes, staring straight ahead, rested on the pond, glimpsed in larger and larger fragments through the trees. Phrases came back to him:

"That's where we'll search for him. . . . We'll have the pond drug . . . if he don't turn up to home . . . with the money ——"

"Yaard's all right when he's *sober*. . . . And when he 'ain't got a *grudge* . . . and a *gun*. . . . That old forty-four ——"

"Remember you're carrying quite a piece of money, Jen, and Yaard ——"

He was well down among the trees now. A phrase of the beef-grower's recurred to him:

"But look here, I only want what's mine. . . ."

Halting, he took from his pocket the notes Yaard had thrust upon him and studied them for a moment with an extraordinary concentration.

"Damn the luck!" he muttered. "Why did he have to think?"

There were six of them, five tens and a two. Holding them out fanwise, he scratched a match and set them on fire. They burned pallidly in the growing light. When the flames had come to his finger tips he gathered the ashes in his palms, rubbed them to dust, threw the dust in the air. And then, turning two of

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his pockets wrong side out with a violence that left one of them torn half across, he went on.

At the pond's edge, where a ribbon of black, frozen earth and stones intervened between the snow and the ice, he laid the grain bag down, folding it neatly two ways. On it he placed the revolver. Then, standing up and shading his eyes, he swept them slowly across the nearer ice. All his actions now were performed with an extraordinary precision, doubly extraordinary in a man who had always faltered and fumbled a little.

"There!" he nodded. "I knew it must be somewhere here."

He had some trouble in getting a stone. He picked out a large, round one and tried to pry it from its bed of frozen mud. It was only after he had pushed and tugged for minutes, his fingers bleeding under the nails with the cruel work, that he had it free in his hands.

Carrying it, he walked out across the ice. He was glad to see that his soles left no imprint on the glassy surface. Schultz, the owner of the ice house at the foot of the pond, had cut a small, rectangular hole about twenty yards out from shore. During the night it had closed up again, but the new ice was only an inch or so thick and showed darker. Jennison cast the stone in the center and the whole new surface caved in with a turmoil of black water. He looked down at

it, and a slight, convulsive shudder passed over his body. He raised his eyes to the eastern ridge.

"I got to hurry."

Returning to the shore, he hesitated only a moment.

"I need more stones." He looked down at the stones. "Let them be, just now. I got to hurry."

Abandoning the pond, the stones, the bag, and the revolver, he started off swiftly through the trees, throwing up a huge furrow with his boots. Five minutes later he was back again, standing in the same place, in the same posture, looking down at the stones. Only the half-congealed sweat on his face told of the enormous exertion he had been through, exertion of which he had been scarcely aware, exertion which seemed, on the face of it, to have gained him nothing. In reality it had accomplished this: whereas, when he had started, there had lain across the snowy expanse between road and pond a single, well-churned foot track, there now lay three, and to the eye of any mountaineer it could be seen that *two* of them led down to the pond, and *only one led back*.

"More stones!" he muttered. "More stones!"

He got down on his knees and fell to the terrible work of tearing them out. The blood ran down freely from his nails; groans issued from his throat, but he felt no pain. When he had four worked loose he put them in the grain bag and tied up the end securely. All this he did mechanically and, as has been said, with an extraordinary precision and thrift of move-

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ment. All the while, across the stage of his transfigured brain thoughts came and went in a troop—words, phrases, small, vivid, and fragmentary pictures. . . .

He saw a crowd of men, grim-faced, angry, gathered at the pond's edge.

He saw them walking along a road.

He saw Hetty Proal's face, as in silhouette against a window with flowers, her hands pressed tight against her whitening cheeks.

He saw Yaard, ignorant as yet of what had happened, opening his door in the night to invisible questioners. He heard him answering, hesitating, as he remembered his promise, grinning slightly: "Jennison? No, I didn't see him. Don't know nothing about him. What? Money? No, I don't know nothing about any money. Where's my forty-four, you say? What's it all about? Say! Yes, yes, that's my grain bag. Can't you see for yourselves? What? Search my house? What do you mean? Say, look here—what the devil!"

The sun trembled under the earth's rim; the sky ran crimson from the eastern ridges to the zenith. Under the spacious glow an illusion of warmth, or of roseate hope, flooded the little valley. Snowbirds flew high. Even the trees seemed to lift their sapless boughs a little to the instant of day. An energy, as inexorable as it was dramatic, carried the man along.

He was standing with his back to the pond and his face toward a little copse of undergrowth fifteen or

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twenty yards up among the poplars. The grain bag was bound to his middle, his belt let out a little and buckled over it, with two of the heavy stones hanging down in either end.

"I got to throw it right there, right there." He repeated it over and over. Somewhere or other he had heard that if a man thought hard enough about a certain action or set of actions he would somehow or other go through with them in the moment of death. "Then," he whispered to himself—"then I got to turn 'round and walk straight."

There was no hesitation, no bungling. Caught up in the dramatic sequence of events and circumstances, he thought, for the first time in his painful, self-centered life, scarcely at all of himself or of what he did. There was no faltering. He held the revolver out at arm's length, aimed at his right breast, his thumb on the trigger.

"I got to throw it right there," he repeated. "Then I got to turn 'round and walk straight out across the ice. . . ."

He was not conscious of any stabbing or rending pain; rather of a broad, flat, heavy blow, as from a fist. He recovered his balance, took his thumb out from the trigger guard carefully, drew back his arm, and threw the weapon into the underbrush, where, flicking the twigs as it passed, it sank out of sight under the snow.

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Then he turned around and walked out across the ice toward the hole. As he walked he said out loud:

"No, I'll be *damned* if you will!"

The blood from his lips fell down and immediately spread out in large, pinkish circles on the ice. The sun's red rim peeped over the ridge directly ahead, laying a sudden, blinding, crimson path before his numb feet.

It seemed farther than he had thought. He walked and walked. The numbness in his legs increased; a great fatigue came over him; the stones in the bag dragged him down. A terrible fear smote him. He had lost his way. He had missed the hole, and, passing it by, walking, walking, under that dragging weight, he must have come almost as far as the center of the pond. It was so far. He began to cough.

One of his feet went out from under him. He clawed at the air and found nothing to sustain him. The water in the hole rose up in a round, black fountain to engulf him.

He felt himself going down and down. The icy impact of the water all around his head seemed to have awakened him from a dream. He opened his eyes, but it was all green and dark. He opened his mouth to shout, and water gushed into his throat. . . .

In the new sunshine bubbles rose to the surface of the water in the hole Shultz had chopped. Breaking, they rocked the floating splinters of ice, like micro-

scopic ships in distress on a miniature sea. And then all was still again.

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Yaard stood as he was for a moment, watching Jennison's laborious progress down the hill. On the spotless mat of the snow the figure of the walker showed vividly in its every detail, the shoulders, the carriage of the head and neck, the awkward posture of the left arm holding the grain bag clear of the snow.

The beef-grower was conscious of a vague sensation of uneasiness. Moved by a formless impulse, he put his hand to his mouth to call after Jennison. And then he took it down again and wheeled at sound of a sudden, close thudding of hoofs on the snow of the road. A big bay gelding between the shafts of a black sleigh was near to running him down.

"Say!" he protested, jumping to one side. And then, seeing whose sleigh it was, his temper changed.

"What you doing there, Judge? If you don't get them bells put on again pretty quick you'll be up for manslaughter in your own court."

Judge Proal peered over the edge of the buffalo robe. He had a broad, jovial, rubicund face, rather dull just now with a hard night spent in a mountain smoking car. He brightened, though, when he discovered who the speaker was, winked his sleepy eyes very hard, and grinned.

"Hullo!" he said. "Hullo, Will! Just got in on

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the 'Five-fifty-eight.' Jump in and I'll give you a lift. . . . Hullo! What's Jennison doing down there?"

He sat up a little straighter and shaded his eyes.

"Where's he going this time of morning with that grain bag? Eh?"

"Oh, he thinks he's got a fox down in his trap," Yaard explained. "Blue one, he thinks, maybe. Borrowed one of my bags and the old cannon. Shoot it in the eye, he says. What you think of that, Judge? Queer, ain't he?"

"Queer enough. I can't stand him for a cent. Here, jump in, will you, and let's get out of here before he sees us and changes his mind. Two's company, three's a crowd. Can't stand him!"

"Say, but you're pretty lucky," he rattled on, jovially, as the gelding answered to the lift of the reins. "I don't know where you've been, but I know you'd have had a long road to go yet on a good cold morning if I hadn't just happened along. You're in luck."

"Luck?"

Yaard lifted his head with an air of protest. The word had begun to get on his nerves. But then he said no more. The horse's hoofs drummed rhythmically in his ears; the keen air rushed across his face, trees fell away swiftly to the rear. A fine languor crept over him. It was warm under the soft weight of the robe. He rubbed his eyes, yawned, laid his head back again, and let it go.

BLUE MURDER

BLUE MURDER

AT MILL CROSSING it was already past sunset. The rays, redder for what autumn leaves were left, still laid fire along the woods crowning the stony slopes of Jim Bluedge's pastures; but then the line of the dusk began and from that level it filled the valley, washing with transparent blue the buildings scattered about the bridge, Jim's house and horse sheds and hay barns, Frank's store, and Camden's blacksmith shop.

The mill had been gone fifty years, but the falls which had turned its wheel still poured in the bottom of the valley, and when the wind came from the Footstool way their mist wet the smithy, built of the old stone on the old foundations, and their pouring drowned the clink of Camden's hammer.

Just now they couldn't drown Camden's hammer, for he wasn't in the smithy; he was at his brother's farm. Standing inside the smaller of the horse paddocks behind the sheds he drove in stakes, one after another, cut green from saplings, and so disposed as to cover the more glaring of the weaknesses in the five-foot fence. From time to time, when one was done and another to do, he rested the head of his sledge in the pocket of his leather apron (he was never without it; it was as though it had grown on him, lumpy with

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odds and ends of his trade—bolts and nails and rusty pliers and old horseshoes) and, standing so, he mopped the sweat from his face and looked up at the mountain.

Of the three brothers he was the dumb one. He seldom had anything to say. It was providential (folks said) that of the three enterprises at the Crossing one was a smithy; for while he was a strong, big, hungry-muscled fellow, he never would have had the shrewdness to run the store or the farm. He was better at pounding—pounding while the fire reddened and the sparks flew, and thinking, and letting other people wonder what he was thinking of.

Blossom Bluedge, his brother's wife, sat perched on the top bar of the paddock gate, holding her skirts around her ankles with a trifle too much care to be quite unconscious, and watched him work. When he looked at the mountain he was looking at the mares, half a mile up the slope, grazing in a line as straight as soldiers, their heads all one way. But Blossom thought it was the receding light he was thinking of, and her own sense of misgiving returned and deepened.

"You'd have thought Jim would be home before this, wouldn't you, Cam?"

Her brother-in-law said nothing.

"Cam, look at me!"

It was nervousness, but it wasn't all nervousness—she was the prettiest girl in the valley; a small part of it was mingled coquetry and pique.

The smith began to drive another stake, swinging

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the hammer from high overhead, his muscles playing in fine big rhythmical convulsions under the skin of his arms and chest, covered with short blond down. Studying him cornerwise, Blossom muttered, "Well, *don't* look at me then!"

He was too dumb for any use. He was as dumb as this: when all three of the Bluedge boys were after her a year ago, Frank, the storekeeper, had brought her candy: chocolates wrapped in silver foil in a two-pound Boston box. Jim had laid before her the Bluedge farm and with it the dominance of the valley. And Camden! To the daughter of Ed Beck, the apple grower, Camden had brought *a box of apples!*—and been bewildered too, when, for all she could help it, she had had to clap a hand over her mouth and run into the house to have her giggle.

A little more than just bewildered, perhaps. Had she, or any of them, ever speculated about that? . . . He had been dumb enough before; but that was when he had started being as dumb as he was now.

Well, if he wanted to be dumb let him be dumb. Pouting her pretty lips and arching her fine brows, she forgot the unimaginative fellow and turned to the ridge again. And now, seeing the sun was quite gone, all the day's vague worries and dreads—held off by this and that—could not be held off longer. For weeks there had been so much talk, so much gossip and speculation and doubt.

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"Camden," she reverted suddenly. "Tell me one thing; did you hear ——"

She stopped there. Some people were coming into the kitchen yard, dark forms in the growing darkness. Most of them lingered at the porch, sitting on the steps and lighting their pipes. The one that came out was Frank, the second of her brothers-in-law. She was glad. Frank wasn't like Camden; he would talk. Turning and taking care of her skirts, she gave him a bright and sisterly smile.

"Well, Frankie, what's the crowd?"

Far from avoiding the smile, as Camden's habit was, the storekeeper returned it with a brotherly wink for good measure. "Oh, they're tired of waiting down the road, so they come up here to see the grand arrival." He was something of a man of the world; in his calling he had acquired a fine turn for skepticism. "Don't want to miss being on hand to see what flaws they can pick in 'Jim's five hundred dollars' wuth of expiriment'."

"Frank, ain't you the least bit worried over Jim? So late?"

"Don't see why."

"All the same, I wish either you or Cam could've gone with him."

"Don't see why. Had all the men from Perry's stable there in Twinshead to help him get the animal off the freight, and he took an extra rope and the log chain and the heavy wagon, so I guess no matter how

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wild and woolly the devil is he'll scarcely be climbing in over the tailboard. Besides, them Western horses ain't such a big breed; even a stallion."

"All the same—(look the other way, Frankie)." Flipping her ankles over the rail, Blossom jumped down beside him. "Listen, Frank, tell me something; did you hear—did you hear the reason Jim's getting him cheap was because he killed a man out West there, what's-its-name, Wyoming?"

Frank was taking off his sleeve protectors, the pins in his mouth. It was Camden, at the bars, speaking in his sudden deep rough way, "Who the hell told you that?"

Frank got the pins out of his mouth. "I guess what it is, Blossie, what's mixed you up is his having that name, 'Blue Murder'."

"No sir! I got some sense and some ears. You don't go fooling me."

Frank laughed indulgently and struck her shoulder with a light hand.

"Don't you worry. Between two horsemen like Jim and Cam——"

"Don't *Cam* me! He's none of *my* horse. I told Jim once——" Breaking off, Camden hoisted his weight over the fence and stood outside, his feet spread and his hammer in both hands, an attitude that would have looked a little ludicrous had anyone been watching him.

Jim had arrived. With a clatter of hoofs and a rat-

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tle of wheels he was in the yard and come to a standstill, calling aloud as he threw the lines over the team, "Well, friends, here we are."

The curious began to edge around, closing a cautious circle. The dusk had deepened so that it was hard to make anything at any distance of Jim's "expiriment" but a blurry silhouette anchored at the wagon's tail. The farmer put an end to it, crying from his eminence, "Now, now, clear out and don't worry him; give him some peace to-night, for Lord's sake! Git!" He jumped to the ground and began to whack his arms, chilled with driving, only to have them pinioned by Blossom's without warning.

"Oh, Jim, I'm so glad you come. I been so worried; gi' me a kiss!"

The farmer reddened, eying the cloud of witnesses. He felt awkward and wished she could have waited. "Get along, didn't I tell you fellows?" he cried with a trace of the Bluedge temper. "Go wait in the kitchen then; I'll tell you all about everything soon's I come in. . . . Well now—wife——"

"What's the matter?" she laughed, an eye over her shoulder. "Nobody's looking that matters. I'm sure Frank don't mind. And as for Camden——"

Camden wasn't looking at them. Still standing with his hammer two-fisted and his legs spread, his chin down and his thoughts to himself (the dumb head) he was looking at Blue Murder, staring at that other dumb head, which, raised high on the motionless

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column of the stallion's neck, seemed hearkening with an exile's doubt to the sounds of this new universe, tasting with wide nostrils the taint in the wind of equine strangers, and studying with eyes accustomed to far horizons these dark pastures that went up in the air.

Whatever the smith's cogitations, presently he let the hammer down and said aloud, "So you're him, eh?"

Jim had put Blossom aside, saying, "Got supper ready? I'm hungry!" Excited by the act of kissing and the sense of witnesses to it, she fussed her hair and started kitchenward as he turned to his brothers.

"Well, what do you make of him?"

"Five hundred dollars," said Frank. "However, it's your money."

Camden was shorter. "Better put him in."

"All right; let them bars down while I and Frank lead him around."

"No, thanks!" The storekeeper kept his hands in his pockets. "I just cleaned up, thanks. Cam's the boy for horses."

"He's none o' my horses!" Camden wet his lips, shook his shoulders, and scowled. "Be damned, no!" He never had the right words, and it made him mad. Hadn't he told Jim from the beginning that he washed his hands of this fool Agricultural College squandering, "and a man killer to the bargain"?

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"Unless," Frank put in slyly, "unless Cam's scared."

"Oh, is Cam scared?"

"Scared?" And still, to the brothers' enduring wonder, the big dense fellow would rise to that boyhood bait. "Scared? The hell I'm scared of any horse ever wore a shoe! Come on, I'll show you! I'll show you!"

"Well, be gentle with him, boys; he may be brittle." As Frank sauntered off around the shed he whistled the latest tune.

In the warmth and light of the kitchen he began to fool with his pretty sister-in-law, feigning princely impatience and growling with a wink at the assembled neighbors, "When do we eat?"

But she protested, "Land, I had everything ready since five, ain't I? And now if it ain't you it's them to wait for. I declare for men!"

At last one of the gossips got in a word.

"What you make of Jim's purchase, Frank?"

"Well, it's Jim's money, Darred. If I had the running of this farm——" Frank began drawing up chairs noisily, leaving it at that.

Darred persisted. "Don't look to me much like an animal for women and children to handle, not yet awhile."

"Cowboys han'les 'em, pa." That was Darred's ten-year-old, big-eyed.

Blossom put the kettle back, protesting, "Leave off,

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or you'll get me worried to death; all your talk . . . I declare, where *are* those bad boys?" Opening the door she called into the dark, "Jim! Cam! Land's sake!"

Subdued by distance and the intervening sheds, she could hear them at their business—sounds muffled and fragmentary, soft thunder of hoofs, snorts, puffings, and the short words of men in action: "Aw, leave him be in the paddock to-night." . . . "With them mares there, you damn fool?" . . . "Damn fool, eh? Try getting him in at that door and see who's the damn fool!" . . . "Come on, don't be so scared." . . . "Scared, eh? Scared?" . . .

Why was it she always felt that curious tightening of all her powers of attention when Camden Bludge spoke? Probably because he spoke so rarely, and then so roughly, as if his own thickness made him mad. Never mind.

"Last call for supper in the dining car, boys!" she called and closed the door. Turning back to the stove she was about to replace the tea water for the third time when, straightening up, she said, "What's that?"

No one else had heard anything. They looked at one another.

"Frank, go—go see what—go tell the boys to come in."

Frank hesitated, feeling foolish, then went to the door.

Then everyone in the room was out of his chair.

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There were three sounds. The first was human and incoherent. The second was incoherent too, but it wasn't human. The third was a crash, a ripping and splintering of wood.

When they got to the paddock they found Camden crawling from beneath the wreckage of the fence where a gap was opened on the pasture side. He must have received a blow on the head, for he seemed dazed. He didn't seem to know they were there. At a precarious balance—one hand at the back of his neck—he stood facing up the hill, gaping after the diminuendo of floundering hoofs, invisible above.

So seconds passed. Again the beast gave tongue, a high wild horning note, and on the black of the stony hill to the right of it a faint shower of sparks blew like fireflies where the herding mares wheeled. It seemed to awaken the dazed smith. He opened his mouth: "*Almighty God!*" Swinging, he flung his arms toward the shed. "*There! There!*"

At last someone brought a lantern. They found Jim Bluedge lying on his back in the corner of the paddock near the door to the shed. In the lantern light, and still better in the kitchen when they had carried him in, they read the record of the thing which Camden, dumb in good earnest now, seemed unable to tell them with anything but his strange unfocused stare.

The bloody offense to the skull would have been enough to kill the man, but it was the second, full on the chest above the heart, that told the tale. On the

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caved grating of the ribs, already turning blue under the yellowish down, the iron shoe had left its mark; and when, laying back the rag of shirt, they saw that the toe of the shoe was upward and the cutting calk-ends down they knew all they wanted to know of that swift, black, crushing episode.

No outlash here of heels in fright. Here was a forefoot. An attack aimed and frontal; an onslaught reared, erect; beast turned biped; red eyes mad to white eyes aghast. . . . And only afterward, when it was done, the blood-fright that serves the horse for conscience; the blind rush across the inclosure; the fence gone down. . . .

No one had much to say. No one seemed to know what to do.

As for Camden, he was no help. He simply stood propped on top of his logs of legs where someone had left him. From the instant when with his "*Almighty God!*" he had been brought back to memory, instead of easing its hold as the minutes passed, the event to which he remained the only living human witness seemed minute by minute to tighten its grip. It set its sweat-beaded stamp on his face, distorted his eyes, and tied his tongue. He was no good to anyone.

As for Blossom, even now—perhaps more than ever now—her dependence on physical touch was the thing that ruled her. Down on her knees beside the lamp they had set on the floor, she plucked at one of the dead man's shoes monotonously, and as it were idly,

swaying the toe like an inverted pendulum from side to side. That was all. Not a word. And when Frank, the only one of the three with any sense, got her up finally and led her away to her room, she clung to *him*.

It was lucky that Frank was a man of affairs. His brother was dead, and frightfully dead, but there was to-morrow for grief. Just now there were many things to do. There were people to be gotten rid of. With short words and angry gestures he cleared them out, all but Darred and a man named White, and to these he said, "Now first thing, Jim can't stay here." He ran and got a blanket from a closet. "Give me a hand and we'll lay him in the ice house overnight. Don't sound good, but it's best, poor fellow. Cam, come along!"

He waited a moment, and as he studied the wooden fool the blood poured back into his face. "Wake up, Cam! You great big scared stiff, you!"

Camden brought his eyes out of nothingness and looked at his brother. A twinge passed over his face, convulsing the mouth muscles. "Scared?"

"Yes, you're scared!" Frank's lip lifted, showing the tips of his teeth. "And I'll warrant you something: if you wasn't the scared stiff you was, this hellish damn thing wouldn't have happened, maybe. Scared! You, a blacksmith! Scared of a horse!"

"*Horse!*" Again that convulsion of the mouth

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muscles, something between irony and an idiot craft. "Why don't you go catch 'im?"

"Hush it! Don't waste time by going loony now, for God's sake. Come!"

"My advice to anybody——" Camden looked crazier than ever, knotting his brows. "My advice to anybody is to let somebody else go catch that—that——" Opening the door he faced out into the night, his head sunk between his shoulders and the fingers working at the ends of his hanging arms; and before they knew it he began to swear. They could hardly hear because his teeth were locked and his breath soft. There were all the vile words he had ever heard in his life, curses and threats and abominations, vindictive, violent, obscene. He stopped only when at a sharp word from Frank he was made aware that Blossom had come back into the room. Even then he didn't seem to comprehend her return but stood blinking at her, and at the rifle she carried, with his distraught bloodshot eyes.

Frank comprehended. Hysteria had followed the girl's blankness. Stepping between her and the body on the floor, he spoke in a persuasive, unhurried way. "What you doing with that gun, Blossie? Now, now, you don't want that gun, you know you don't."

It worked. Her rigidity lessened appreciably. Confusion gained.

"Well, but—oh, Frank—well, but when we going to shoot him?"

"Yes, yes, Blossie—now, yes—only you best give

me that gun; that's the girlie." When he had got the weapon he put an arm around her shoulders. "Yes, yes, course we're going to shoot him; what you think? Don't want an animal like that running round. Now first thing in the morning——"

Hysteria returned. With its strength she resisted his leading.

"No, now! *Now!* He's gone and killed Jim! Killed my husband! I won't have him left alive another minute! I won't! *Now!* No sir, I'm going myself, I am! Frank, I am! *Cam!*"

At his name, appealed to in that queer screeching way, the man in the doorway shivered all over, wet his lips, and walked out into the dark.

"There, you see?" Frank was quick to capitalize anything. "Cam's gone to do it. Cam's gone, Blossie! . . . Here, one of you—Darred, take this gun and run give it to Camden, that's the boy."

"You sure he'll kill him, Frank? You *sure?*"

"Sure as daylight. Now you come along back to your room like a good girl and get some rest. Come, I'll go with you."

When Frank returned to the kitchen ten minutes later, Darred was back.

"Well, now, let's get at it and carry out poor Jim; he can't lay here. . . . Where's Cam gone *now*, damn him!"

"Cam? Why, he's gone and went."

"Went where?"

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"Up the pasture, like you said."

"Like I——" Frank went an odd color. He walked to the door. Between the light on the sill and the beginnings of the stars where the woods crowned the mountain was all one blackness. One stillness too. He turned on Darred. "But look, you never gave him that gun, even."

"He didn't want it."

"Lord's sake; what did he say?"

"Said nothing. He'd got the log chain out of the wagon and when I caught him he was up hunting his hammer in under that wreck at the fence. Once he found it he started off up. 'Cam,' says I, 'here's a gun; want it?' He seem not to. Just went on walking on up."

"How'd he look?"

"Look same's you seen him looking. Sick."

"The damned fool!" . . .

Poor dead Jim! Poor fool Camden! As the store-keeper went about his business and afterward when, the ice house door closed on its tragic tenant and White and Darred gone off home, he roamed the yard, driven here and there, soft-footed, waiting, hearken-ing—his mind was for a time not his own property but the plaything of thoughts diverse and wayward. Jim, his brother, so suddenly and so violently gone. The stallion. That beast that had kicked him to death. With anger and hate and pitiless impatience of time he thought of the morrow, when they would catch him

and take their revenge with guns and clubs. Behind these speculations, covering the background of his consciousness and stringing his nerves to endless vigil, spread the wall of the mountain: silent from instant to instant but devising under its black silence (who-could-know-what instant to come) a neigh, a yell, a spark-line of iron hoofs on rolling flints, a groan. And still behind that and deeper into the borders of the unconscious, the storekeeper thought of the farm that had lost its master, the rich bottoms, the broad well-stocked pastures, the fat barns, and the comfortable house whose chimneys and gable ends fell into changing shapes of perspective against the stars as he wandered here and there. . . .

Jim gone. . . . And Camden, at any moment . . .

His face grew hot. An impulse carried him a dozen steps. "I ought to go up. Ought to take the gun and go up." But there shrewd sanity put on the brakes. "Where's the use? Couldn't find him in this dark. Besides, I oughtn't to leave Blossom here alone."

With that he went around toward the kitchen, thinking to go in. But the sight of the lantern, left burning out near the sheds, sent his ideas off on another course. At any rate it would give his muscles and nerves something to work on. Taking the lantern and entering the paddock, he fell to patching the gap into the pasture, using broken boards from the wreck. As he worked his eyes chanced to fall on footprints in the dung-mixed earth—Camden's footprints leading

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away beyond the little ring of light. And beside them, taking off from the landing place of that prodigious leap, he discerned the trail of the stallion. After a moment he got down on his knees where the earth was softest, holding the lantern so that its light fell full.

He gave over his fence building. Returning to the house his gait was no longer that of the roamer; his face, caught by the periodic flare of the swinging lantern, was the face of another man. In its expression there was a kind of fright and a kind of calculating eagerness. He looked at the clock on the kitchen shelf, shook it, and read it again. He went to the telephone and fumbled at the receiver. He waited till his hand quit shaking, then removed it from the hook.

"Listen, Darred," he said, when he had got the farmer at last, "get White and whatever others you can and come over first thing it's light. Come a-riding and bring your guns. No, Cam ain't back."

He heard Blossom calling. Outside her door he passed one hand down over his face, as he might have passed a wash rag, to wipe off what was there. Then he went in.

"What's the matter with Blossie? Can't sleep?"

"No, I can't sleep. Can't think. Can't sleep. Oh, Frankie!"

He sat down beside the bed.

"Oh, Frankie, Frankie, *hold my hand!*"

She looked almost homely, her face bleached out and her hair in a mess on the pillow. But she would

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get over that. And the short sleeve of the nightgown on the arm he held was edged with pretty lace.

"Got your watch here?" he asked. She gave it to him from under the pillow. This too he shook as if he couldn't believe it was going.

Pretty Blossom Beck. Here for a wonder he sat in her bedroom and held her hand. One brother was dead and the other was on the mountain.

But little by little, as he sat and dreamed so, nightmare crept over his brain. He had to arouse and shake himself. He had to set his thoughts resolutely in other roads. . . . Perhaps there would be even the smithy. The smithy, the store, the farm. Complete. The farm, the farmhouse, the room in the farmhouse, the bed in the room, the wife in the bed. Complete beyond belief. If . . . Worth dodging horror for. If . . .

"Frank, has Cam come back?"

"Cam? Don't you worry about Cam. . . . Where's that watch again? . . ."

Far from rounding up their quarry in the early hours after dawn, it took the riders, five of them, till almost noon simply to make certain that he wasn't to be found—not in any of the pastures. Then when they discovered the hole in the fence far up in the woods beyond the crest where Blue Murder had led the mares in a break for the open country of hills and ravines to the south, they were only at the beginning.

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The farmers had left their work undone at home and, as the afternoon lengthened and with it the shadows in the hollow places, they began to eye one another behind their leader's back. Yet they couldn't say it; there was something in the storekeeper's air to-day, something zealous and pitiless and fanatical, that shut them up and pulled them plodding on.

Frank did the trailing. Hopeless of getting anywhere before sundown in that unkempt wilderness of a hundred square miles of scrub, his companions slouched in their saddles and rode more and more mechanically, knee to knee, and it was he who made the casts to recover the lost trail and, dismounting to read the dust, cried back, "He's still with 'em," and with gestures of imperious excitement beckoned them on.

"Which you mean?" Darred asked him once. "Cam, or the horse?"

Frank wheeled his beast and spurred back at the speaker. It was extraordinary. "You don't know what you're talking about!" he cried, with a causelessness and a disordered vehemence which set them first staring, then speculating. "Come on, you dumb-heads; don't talk—*ride!*"

By the following day, when it was being told in all the farmhouses, the story might vary in details and more and more as the tellings multiplied, but in its fundamentals it remained the same. In one thing they certainly all agreed: they used the same expres-

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sion—"It was like Frank was drove. Drove in a race against something, and not sparing the whip."

They were a good six miles to the south of the fence. Already the road back home would have to be followed three parts in the dark.

Darred was the spokesman. "Frank, I'm going to call it a day."

The others reined up with him but the man ahead rode on. He didn't seem to hear. Darred lifted his voice. "Come on, call it a day, Frank. To-morrow, maybe. But you see we've run it out and they're not here."

"Wait," said Frank over his shoulder, still riding on into the pocket.

White's mount—a mare—laid back her ears, shied, and stood trembling. After a moment she whinnied.

It was as if she had whinnied for a dozen. A crashing in the woods above them to the left and the avalanche came—down streaming, erupting, wheeling, wheeling away with volleying snorts, a dark rout.

Darred, reining his horse, began to shout, "Here they go this way, Frank!" But Frank was yelling, "Up here, boys! This way, quick!"

It was the same note, excited, feverish, disordered, breaking like a child's. When they neared him they saw he was off his horse, rifle in hand, and down on his knees to study the ground where the woods began. By the time they reached his animal the impetuous

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fellow had started up into the cover, his voice trailing, "Come on; spread out and come on!"

One of the farmers got down. When he saw the other three keeping their saddles he swung up again.

White spoke this time. "Be darned if I do!" He lifted a protesting hail, "Come back here, Frank! You're crazy! It's getting dark!"

It was Frank's own fault. They told him plainly to come back and he wouldn't listen.

For a while they could hear his crackle in the mounting underbrush. Then that stopped, whether he had gone too far for their ears or whether he had come to a halt to give his own ears a chance. . . . Once, off to his right, a little higher up under the low ceiling of the trees that darkened moment by moment with the rush of night, they heard another movement, another restlessness of leaves and stones. Then that was still, and everything was still.

Darred ran a sleeve over his face and swung down. "God alive, boys!"

It was the silence. All agreed there—the silence and the deepening dusk.

The first they heard was the shot. No voice. Just the one report. Then after five breaths of another silence a crashing of growth, a charge in the darkness under the withered scrub, continuous and diminishing.

They shouted, "Frank!" No answer. They called, "*Frank Bluedge!*"

Now, since they had to, they did. Keeping con-

tact by word, and guided partly by directional memory (and mostly in the end by luck), after a time they found the storekeeper in a brake of ferns, lying across his gun.

They got him down to the open, watching behind them all the while. Only then, by the flares of successive matches, under the noses of the snorting horses, did they look for the damage done.

They remembered the stillness and the gloom; it must have been quite black in there. The attack had come from behind—equine and pantherine at once, and planned and cunning. A deliberate lunge with a forefoot again: the shoe which had crushed the backbone between the shoulder blades was a fore shoe; that much they saw by the match flares in the red wreck.

They took no longer getting home than they had to, but it was longer than they would have wished. With Frank across his own saddle, walking their horses and with one or another ahead to pick the road (it was going to rain, and even the stars were lost), they made no more than a creeping speed.

None of them had much to say on the journey. Finding the break in the boundary fence and feeling through the last of the woods, the lights of their farms began to show in the pool of blackness below, and Darred uttered a part of what had lain in the minds of them all during the return:

“Well, that leaves Cam.”

None followed it up. None cared to go any closer

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than he was to the real question. Something new, alien, menacing and pitiless had come into the valley of their lives with that beast they had never really seen; they felt its oppression, every one, and kept the real question back in their minds: "*Does it leave Cam?*"

It answered itself. Camden was at home when they got there.

He had come in a little before them, empty-handed. Empty-headed too. When Blossom, who had waited all day, part of the time with neighbor women who had come in and part of the time alone to the point of going mad—when she saw him coming down the pasture, his feet stumbling and his shoulders dejected, her first feeling was relief. Her first words, however, were, "Did you get him, Cam?" And all he would answer was, "Gi'me something to eat, can't you? Gi'me a few hours' sleep, can't you? Then wait!"

He looked as if he would need more than a few hours' sleep. Propped on his elbows over his plate, it seemed as though his eyes would close before his mouth would open.

His skin was scored by thorns and his shirt was in ribbons under the straps of his iron-sagged apron; but it was not by these marks that his twenty-odd hours showed: it was by his face. While yet his eyes were open and his wits still half awake, his face surrendered. The flesh relaxed into lines of stupor, a putty-formed, putty-colored mask of sleep.

Once he let himself be aroused. This was when, to an abstracted query as to Frank's whereabouts, Blossom told him Frank had been out with four others since dawn. He heaved clear of the table and opened his eyes at her, showing the red around the rims.

He spoke with the thick tongue of a drunkard. "If anybody but me lays hand on that stallion I'll kill him. I'll wring his neck."

Then he relapsed into his stupidity, and not even the arrival of the party bringing his brother's body seemed able to shake him so far clear of it again.

At first, when they had laid Frank on the floor where on the night before they had laid Jim, he seemed hardly to comprehend.

"What's wrong with Frank?"

"Some more of Jim's 'expiriment'."

"Frank see him? He's scared, Frank is. Look at his face there."

"He's dead, Cam."

"Dead, you say? Frank dead? Dead of fright; is that it?"

Even when, rolling the body over they showed him what was what, he appeared incapable of comprehension, of amazement, of passion, or of any added grief. He looked at them all with a kind of befuddled protest. Returning to his chair and his plate, he grumbled, "Le'me eat first, can't you? Can't you gi'me a little time to sleep?"

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"Well, you wouldn't do much to-night anyway, I guess."

At White's words Blossom opened her mouth for the first time.

"No, nothing to-night, Cam. Cam! *Camden!* Say! Promise!"

"And then to-morrow, Cam, what we'll do is to get every last man in the valley, and we'll go at this right. We'll lay hand on that devil——"

Camden swallowed his mouthful of cold steak with difficulty. His obsession touched, he showed them the rims of his eyes again.

"You do and I'll wring your necks. The man that touches that animal before I do gets his neck wrang. That's all you need to remember."

"Yes, yes—no—that is——" Poor Blossom. "Yes, Mr. White, thanks; no, Cam's not going out to-night. . . . No, Cam, nobody's going to interfere—nor nothing. Don't you worry there. . . ."

Again poor Blossom! Disaster piled too swiftly on disaster; no discipline but instinct left. Caught in fire and flood and earthquake and not knowing what to come, and no creed but "save him who can!"—by hook or crook of wile or smile. With the valley of her life emptied out, and its emptiness repeopled monstrously and pressing down black on the roof under which (now that Frank was gone to the ice house too and the farmers back home) one brother was left of three—she would tread softly, she would talk or she would be

dumb, as her sidelong glimpses of the awake-asleep man's face above the table told her was the instant's need; or if he would eat, she would magic out of nothing something, anything; or if he would sleep, he could sleep, so long as he slept in that house where she could know he was sleeping.

Only one thing. If she could touch him. If she could touch and cling.

Lightning filled the windows. After a moment the thunder came avalanching down the pasture and brought up against the clapboards of the house. At this she was behind his chair. She put out a hand. She touched his shoulder. The shoulder was bare, the shirt ripped away; it was caked with sweat and with the blackening smears of scratches, but for all its exhaustion and dirt it was flesh alive—a living man to touch.

Camden blundered up. "What the hell!" He started off two steps and wheeled on her. "Why don't you get off to bed for Goll sake!"

"Yes, Cam, yes—right off, yes."

"Well, *I'm* going, I can tell you. For Goll sake, I need some sleep!"

"Yes, that's right, yes, Cam, good night, Cam—only—only you promise—promise you won't go out—nowheres."

"Go *out*? Not likely I won't! Not *likely*! Get along."

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It took her no time to get along then—quick and quiet as a mouse.

Camden lingered to stand at one of the windows where the lightning came again, throwing the black barns and paddocks at him from the white sweep of the pastures crowned by woods.

As it had taken her no time to go, it took Blossom no time to undress and get in bed. When Camden was on his way to his room he heard her calling, "Cam! Just a second, Cam!"

In the dark outside her door he drew one hand down over his face, wiping off whatever might be there. Then he entered.

"Yes? What?"

"Cam, set by me a minute, won't you? And Cam, oh Cam, hold my hand."

As he slouched down, his fist inclosing her fingers, thoughts awakened and ran and fastened on things. They fastened, tentatively at first, upon the farm. Jim gone. Frank gone. The smithy, the store, and the farm. The whole of Mill Crossing. The trinity. The three in one. . . .

"Tight, Cam, for pity's sake! Hold it tight!"

His eyes, falling to his fist, strayed up along the arm it held. The sleeve, rumpled near the shoulder, was trimmed with pretty lace. . . .

"Tighter, Cam!"

A box of apples. That memory hidden away in the cellar of his mind. Hidden away, clamped down in

the dark, till the noxious vapors, the murderous vapors of its rotting had filled the shut-up house he was. . . . A box of red apples for the apple-grower's girl . . . the girl who sniggered and ran away from him to laugh at him. . . .

And here, by the unfolding of a devious destiny, he sat in that girl's bedroom, holding that girl's hand. Jim who had got her, Frank who had wanted her lay side by side out there in the ice house under the lightning. While he, the "dumb one"—the last to be thought of with anything but amusement and the last to be feared—his big hot fist inclosing her imprecating hand now, and his eyes on the pretty lace at her shoulder—He jumped up with a gulp and a clatter of iron.

"What the —" He flung her hand away. "What the—hell!" He swallowed. "Damn you, Blossie Beck!" He stared at her with repugnance and mortal fright. "Why, you—you—you ——"

He moderated his voice with an effort, wiping his brow, "Good night. You must excuse me, Blossie; I wasn't meaning—I mean—I hope you sleep good. I shall. . . . Good night!"

In his own brain was the one word, "Hurry!"

She lay and listened to his boots going along the hall and heard the closing of his door. She ought to have put out the lamp. But even with the shades drawn, the lightning around the edges of the window

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unnerved her; in the dark alone it would have been more than she could bear.

She lay so till she felt herself nearing exhaustion from the sustained rigidity of her limbs. Rain came and with the rain, wind. Around the eaves it neighed like wild stallions; down the chimneys it moaned like men.

Slipping out of bed and pulling on a bathrobe she ran from her room, barefooted, and along the hall to Camden's door.

"Cam!" she called. "Oh, Cam!" she begged. "Please, please!"

And now he wouldn't answer her.

New lightning, diffused through all the sky by the blown rain, ran at her along the corridor. She pushed the door open. The lamp was burning on the bureau but the room was empty and the bed untouched.

Taking the lamp she skittered down to the kitchen. No one there. . . .

"Hurry!"

Camden had reached the woods when the rain came. Lighting the lantern he had brought, he made his way on to the boundary fence. There, about a mile to the east of the path the others had taken that day, he pulled the rails down and tumbled the stones together in a pile. Then he proceeded another hundred yards, holding the lantern high and peering through the streaming crystals of the rain.

Blue Murder was there. Neither the chain nor the sapling had given way. The lantern and, better than the lantern, a globe of lightning, showed the tethered stallion glistening and quivering, his eyes all whites at the man's approach.

"Gentle, boy; steady, boy!" Talking all the while in the way he had with horses, Camden put a hand on the taut chain and bore with a gradually progressive weight, bringing the dark head nearer. "Steady, boy; gentle there, damn you; gentle!"

Was he afraid of horses? Who was it said he was afraid of horses?

The beast's head was against the man's chest, held there by an arm thrown over the bowed neck. As he smoothed the forehead and fingered the nose with false caresses, Camden's "horse talk" ran on—the cadence one thing, the words another.

"Steady, Goll damn you; you're going to get yours. Cheer up, cheer up, the worst is yet to come. Come now! Come easy! Come along!"

When he had unloosed the chain, he felt for and found with his free hand his hammer hidden behind the tree. Throwing the lantern into the brush, where it flared for an instant before dying, he led the stallion back as far as the break he had made in the fence. Taking a turn with the chain around the animal's nose, like an improvised hackamore, he swung from the stone pile to the slippery back. A moment's shying, a sliding caracole of amazement and distrust, a crushing of

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knees, a lash of the chain end, and that was all there was to that. Blue Murder had been ridden before. . . .

In the smithy, chambered in the roaring of the falls and the swish and shock of the storm, Camden sang as he pumped his bellows, filling the cave beneath the rafters with red. The air was nothing, the words were mumbo-jumbo, but they swelled his chest. His eyes, cast from time to time at his wheeling prisoner, had lost their look of helplessness and surly distraction.

Scared? He? No, no, no! Now that he wasn't any longer afraid of time, he wasn't afraid of anything on earth.

"Shy, you devil!" He wagged his exalted head. "Whicker, you hellion! Whicker all you want to, stud horse! To-morrow they're going to get you, the numb fools! To-morrow they can have you. *I got you to-night!*"

He was more than other men; he was enormous. Fishing an iron shoe from that inseparable apron pocket of his, he thrust it into the coals and blew and blew. He tried it and it was burning red. He tried it again and it was searing white. Taking it out on the anvil he began to beat it, swinging his hammer one-handed, gigantic. So in the crimson light, irradiating iron sparks, he was at his greatest. Pounding, pounding. A man in the dark of night with a hammer about him can do wonders; with a horseshoe about him he can cover up a sin. And if the dark of night in a pad-

dock won't hold it, then the dark of undergrowth on a mountain side will. . . .

Pounding, pounding; thinking, thinking, in a great halo of hot stars. Feeding his hungry, his insatiable muscles.

"Steady now, you blue bastard! Steady, boy!"

What he did not realize in his feverish exaltation was that his muscles were not insatiable. In the thirty-odd hours past they had had a feast spread before them and they had had their fill. . . . More than their fill.

As with the scorching iron in his tongs he approached the stallion, he had to step over the nail box he had stepped over five thousand times in the routine of every day.

A box of apples, eh? Apples to snigger at, eh? But whose girl are you now? . . . Scared, eh?

His foot was heavier of a sudden than it should have been. This five thousand and first time, by the drag of the tenth of an inch, the heel caught the lip of the nail box.

He tried to save himself from stumbling. At the same time, instinctively, he held the iron flame in his tongs away.

There was a scream out of a horse's throat; a whiff of hair and burnt flesh.

There was a lash of something in the red shadows. There was another sound and another wisp of stench. . . .

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When, guided by the stallion's whinnying, they found the smith next day, they saw by the cant of his head that his neck was broken, and they perceived that he too had on him the mark of a shoe. It lay up one side of his throat and the broad of a cheek. It wasn't blue this time, however—it was red. It took them some instants in the sunshine pouring through the wide door to comprehend this phenomenon. It wasn't sunk in by a blow this time; it was burned in, a brand.

Darred called them to look at the stallion, chained behind the forge.

"Almighty God!" The words sounded funny in his mouth. They sounded the funnier in that they were the same ones the blundering smith had uttered when, staring uphill from his clever wreckage of the paddock fence, he had seen the mares striking sparks from the stones where the stallion struck none. And he, of all men, a smith!

"Almighty God!" called Darred. "What you make of these here feet?"

One fore hoof was freshly pared for shoeing; the other three hoofs were as virgin as any yearling's on the plains. Blue Murder had never yet been shod. . . .

WHEN HELL FROZE

VII

WHEN HELL FROZE

IT was the biggest farm on the Footstool: it had smooth swelling fields, like waves; well-tended wood lots, and clean fat cattle. Addie Joslin was part of it. The strength of her eighteen years of married life had gone into it; season by season she had served its needs, spending much on the land and little on herself.

The only really hard time was the week in the fall when her husband was away in New York on his year's business, and especially now that he was taking Ray with him. But it was time their firstborn should be learning those other things, remote, but apparently as essential to the growth and well-being of the soil as the things that lay in her knowledge—tillage, drainage, and manure. And after all, no matter how long a week may seem on double and treble duty, it is only seven days.

She had the church, the grange, the Daughters of the Morning Star; she had her diversions if she cared to take them. This she seldom did. Her life had little in it that was separate from the farm. Even Frankie, the four-year-old, her baby, was not separate; little that was not of her or of the fields or cattle was

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in him. He was made of her and the earth, and she was made of the earth.

She was slow of speech and reason, a slow woman. This was because she saw all things moving in unalterable sequence. Seed, sprout, full stalk, threshed grain—as simply as that unfolded all the thoughts she needed. So her hair stayed brown and there were no wrinkles about her eyes.

This evening she was a little tired. But to-night John and Ray would be home; perhaps in time for the milking. The week was all but done.

A little tired, yes. When she had started the cows up from the lower pasture, instead of following at once she rested her weight on the fence in the shriveled shadow of an aspen and stood dreaming up the land, her eyes moving slowly from field to higher field, reaped and brown.

It all did look pretty, with the sun setting behind the mountain.

It had done well this year; well.

Would they be home in time for the milking? First there was Heather to be milked, then Sally, then Dapple, then Princess, then Snow. She must be getting lazy, she guessed. She had better be starting her boots.

But now there was a sound of music. It was strange to hear music down here. Forgetting the cows for another moment she turned to look. There was a path beyond the fence, leading up from southwest of the

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mountain, and a man came along it playing a harmonica. He was tall, red-headed, and lank; under one elbow he gripped a pack while with the other he beat time, a perfect vagabond. Observing Addie he halted and took off his hat.

"How d'you do? Good evening."

Not being much with strangers Addie kept her mouth shut, nodded slightly, and looked beyond him at the ridges, powdered pink with sunset. The man came and got up to sit on the fence. He played softly a few more bars. Addie turned to go. He whacked the instrument on his thigh and said: "Excuse me, but do you know a town called Twinshead up this way, lady?"

"Yes." She stopped and eyed him. "I ought to, I was raised there."

"You was? Know a man named House there? Garage man?"

"I ought to—he's my brother-in-law."

"Well, I swear! He's the man I was figuring to work for."

"He is? Well, he's my brother-in-law."

"How far would you call it from here?"

"Over down in the next valley. Around six mile."

"Six mile, eh? Some step! Listen; any place around here a man could get a shakedown for the night, lady? I'm not much chopping wood, but if you got any Lord's kind of a gas engine wants tinkering. . . ."

"Well, if my husband gets home as I'm expecting

them, there's the seedan's been knocking lately. Though I don't know certain he'll come. But then if he don't there's Hurlbut's, a half mile on down."

He got over the fence. "Well, what do you say we see?"

He came along a little at the trail, busy again with his tunes, as, climbing and clucking, she got the cattle through the successive gates. When they had come up into the last lane she said: "You play pretty. Although I must say I don't know those tunes."

"Latest things. I don't suppose they're up this way yet."

"I don't know. I'm not much on town. When I was a girl though, in town, I used to know all the songs going."

"I bet. Know this one? *'I thought it was a kiss, but it was just an idle dream.'* Remember?"

"Yes, certainly . . . Frankie!" she called to her child, who, halfway down from the house, had stopped at sight of the stranger. "Come walk with Mama; come!" And as the boy, pouting, edged a few shy steps nearer: "Yes, certainly, I know that and a lot of others: the 'Merry Widow' and '*Come, come, I love you only,*' and all those."

"It's funny how those old ones stick by you. The ones nowadays—though now and then you'll find one—listen to this."

Cupping the toy in both hands he lifted his brows and drooped his lids. He breathed softly among the

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reeds. He loved it. When he reached the end he recited the ultimate phrase with the throaty husk of the devotee, watching her eyes for approbation: "*Kiss me, kiss me, aga-i-n . . .*"

She gave her thumb to Frankie.

"What's the matter with *you*, for Heaven's sake?"

"Is he my uncle?" The boy pulled around behind her. She laughed.

"Uncle? Land, no! He's nobody you know."

"What you been givin' him kisses fer then?"

Addie's mouth fell open. "Don't say such things; the idea!" She gave his hand a shake. "I—well—you don't understand, that's all."

The stranger grinned, his amused eyes going from one to the other.

Frankie persisted. "Did you kiss him fer playin' so nice, Mama?"

The man laughed outright, arms akimbo, head up. "Look-a-here," he cried, bending suddenly and holding the harmonica out on his palm. "What you say to that, sonny? Like play moosic? Well, take that with my regards; that'll keep you busy, won't it now?"

"Oh, he shouldn't," his mother muttered, as the small fingers edged around her skirt. Once he had hold of the treasure the boy was away like an Indian's shadow, through the fence and into the cover of the dogwood hedge beyond.

The man chuckled. "Oh, no, he didn't care for it

at all; couldn't find house room for it. Oh, no!" He shifted his pack and began to whistle.

When Addie came up to the yard after impounding the cows she found the man sitting on the kitchen stoop, still whistling.

"I guess my husband ain't coming to-night after all," she said, looking up and down the darkening road. Entering the house she came out again with some pie and cheese and a cup of milk. "Though I shouldn't feel like turning you away without a snack. Then 'tain't far down to Hurlbut's."

As he sat munching, the man began to study her with a new obliquity.

"How long's your husband away for?"

"He goes a week every fall on business to New York City."

"Aren't you ever kind of lonesome?"

"No time for lonesomeness. I ought to be milking right now."

"Still, up here by yourself, everybody away." He took out a cigarette and lit it. "Eh? Don't you ever wish—well—there was some man around the place, nights?"

Addie shook her head. "There's nothing to harm a body up this way."

The man shook his. "I give it up." He wiped his mouth and got to his feet. "Then I guess I'll be on my way. Now I've had supper, thanks to your kind-

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ness, I guess I might's well go on through. Is it around this way out?"

She showed him, walking down as far as the gate.

"Still," he mused, "the men have all the fun, don't they? I suppose your hubby always tells you everything he does while he's in New York?"

"I don't see what you mean. If you mean he carries on, then you don't know John A. Joslin. And moreover, he's got Ray along; that's our oldest."

"How old?"

"Going on seventeen. But he's big for his age."

The man slapped his thigh. "I bet!"

"Well," he said, when he was done chuckling, "I suppose if you're dead certain you're not going to want protecting to-night—I might's well be on my way. Thanks very much for the bite, and if you're ever in Twinshead this winter, look me up. . . . Good night."

For another moment Addie leaned there watching him off into the dusk.

What was all that talk of his? Who was he? Where had he come from? From as near as the nearest town? From as far as China? A strange irresponsible fellow riding his legs across the mountains, whistling across the world.

"I want my supper." It was Frankie at her elbow, whining.

"Heavens and Earth, what am I thinking of! Those poor cows!"

The men came that night after all, when the chores

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were done and Frankie in bed. Hearing the car turn into the yard, Addie put a piece of meat in the spider and began cutting up some cold potatoes to brown, so that by the time they came in their supper was half ready.

It always gave her a queer turn for a moment when they arrived, like two strangers with their good clothes and their suit cases, and the way, for the first instant, they looked around, as if it were a new hotel. She would have been glad if it could have lasted longer. That was why she had hurried to get things under way and their chairs drawn up to the table.

"If you'll set right down your supper 'll be on in no time."

"Well, no." Her husband gave her a kiss on a cheek bone—one of the year's two—and adding, "Might's well be comfortable," passed on upstairs.

She wondered if Ray would kiss her too this year. But just as he was on the point of it he remembered something more important.

"Oh, Ma, d'you know what? We bought you a present to bring home, a couple of nice aprons, and then what 'd we go and do but leave 'em in the train. Wasn't that a bright one?" And he too went upstairs.

Above the sputter of the frying meat she could hear their voices, Ray's mostly, fragmentary and muffled. Once Ray laughed. He came down in his corduroys and brown sweater, and in pulling off his shirt he had spoiled his hair. His father was in his nightshirt,

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over which he had drawn a pair of overalls. They might neither of them have been away.

They ate in silence, chewing like tired men, their elbows guarding their plates and their eyes centered in the flame of the lamp between them. They seemed to be dreaming. Once Ray chuckled, his eyes passing to his father. The old man cast him a dour look. "You calm down."

Addie opened some pears. "Everything all right in the city?" she inquired as she helped them. Joslin nodded at the lamp, protruding his lower lip. "I'd say so, yes, all right. . . ."

She went and got the new *Sentinel*. Joslin wiped his mouth, opened the paper, cast an eye over the deaths, and yawned.

"Frankie all right?" he asked by and by.

"Yes, Frankie's all right."

"Stock all right?"

"Yes, all right. Except a funny thing about Snow's calf——"

"What's wrong with Snow's calf?"

"Nothing, only the way she acts about the red rooster. It was the day you left——" Addie drew up a chair and put her elbows on the table. "No, it was the day *after* you left, I guess; yes, Wednesday morning——"

Joslin's lids drooped. His chin was sinking into his neck. He straightened up when Addie's voice stopped, and muttered: "Been a hard day."

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"Been a hard week," Ray added facetiously, staring at the lamp.

His father got to his feet. "You be up and down by four sharp, son, that's all." He took a match and went upstairs. Ray leaned back and began to play a harmonica. It was "The Sidewalks of New York."

"Where'd this thing come from?" he demanded, stopping in the middle of a bar. "I had one like it, but it was an 'A'."

"It's Frankie's." Addie began to scrape the plates.

"Where'd he get it?"

She didn't feel like talking any more; all that explanation. So she said: "Somebody or other give it to him, I guess."

Ordinarily she would have washed the dishes, but this was the night her husband had come home, so she stacked them and, asking Ray to put out the light when he came she went upstairs, taking off her apron. Just before she reached their bedroom she had a start. Then she could have smiled, for it was only Frankie, out of bed, half awake, in the dark hall.

He resisted her hand. "I wan' my thing; ut's mine."

"What thing? You're dreaming. Go back to bed."

"Who's 'at uts got ut, playin'?"

"Playing what? Oh, I see, yes, your——"

"My moosic thing, ut 'at man gin me, ut you kissed."

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"Shhh!" Addie stood back on her heels. "Hush your mouth!" It was absurd but she felt helpless.

Frankie turned sullen. "No, but I wan' ut; ut's mine."

"Yes, all right, yes. You be still and run back to bed like a good boy, and I'll go straight and get it for you." She returned below stairs.

"Ray, gi'me that. Your brother's woke up fretting, and it's his."

The child was waiting at the top. She led him back and tucked him in.

"Here it is, Frankie, but listen, you shouldn't say that about that man. It's bad—naughty, because I never did. Now go bye-bye and forget it."

Smoothing his hair she left him. At the door, however, she vacillated. It was so laughable, yet it made her feel so helpless. She was used to dealing with things that had some logic in them. It exasperated her.

Returning to the bedside she got down and put her lips to his ear.

"If ever you say that again about my such a thing as kissing that or any other man, I'll spank you. I'll take down your panties and spank you with the hair-brush, hard; you hear?"

Then she went to their room. The lamp was turned low. Her husband was in bed, asleep.

Well, he'd had a hard day, this traveling. He'd had a hard week.

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She undressed and blew out the light, and, going to the window, stood there awhile. The moon was up, sailing in a cloudless sky; under it the farm lay, sloping away; gently swelling smooth fields in the pale light, like pale breasts on the mountain, against the black hem of the woods below.

Her thoughts were in two layers. In the top layer there were these: now they've come home we can get the manure started out on the west plowing and we can decide if we'll change it to rye; we can weed out the pullets, and we can get to work and ditch the waste piece before it freezes.

In the bottom layer, the buried one, was this: They are not part of it, as I am; I am part of it and it is part of me. The deep reason for her being, the long, habitual, fruitful identity with the soil and its creatures, filled her unconscious thoughts. Who, to this dark Amazonian tenant of her soul, were those two men of whom she was a little awed; those two who went away and had a time, and left her alone at last with the autumnal land, at rest after the summer's travail, at peace for a little while? They owned the farm. Yes, but it was hers. . . .

What she was thinking as she crept under the blankets beside the sleeper was: "I wonder what color aprons they were." . . .

The men were cutting out brush in the waste piece, preparatory to ditching. It was the day which last

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night had presaged—perfect autumn, chill in the shadows, glassy clear. The mountain stood solid and separate; the sky, no longer weighing on the horizons, showed itself detached and whole, going on around. Beast and fowl made themselves heard, sounds reiterant, monotonous and good, bawling of young cattle, ruffle and cut-cut of hens, pigs grunting, and Frankie marching to his harmonica, a suck and a blow, a suck and a blow, soul-satisfying, around the barn, around the orchard, around the sheds.

“Mama, kin I go down see Ray yet?”

“Not yet, you’ll be in the way; run try and find Speck’s nest.”

Another circuit. “Mama, kin I go yet?”

“Not yet.”

Even the apples Addie was sorting seemed to fall in with the cosmic rhythm: a cider, a cider, a cider, an eating, a pie. Under her breath, inattentively, she hummed fragments of old tunes. “*I thought it was a kiss, but it was just an idle dream.*” For her and for the farm it was the beginning of another year.

Clear reddening sunlight. Cut-cut! Mooo-ugh! A loudening harmonica.

“Mama, kin I go down see Ray yet?”

“Yes, pester you, run along; I’ll be down in a second for the cows.”

Joslin was just coming up as she entered the lane, an axe over his shoulder and his one remaining fore-

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lock plastered on his brow. He was a lean wiry man, a hard worker, as faithful a worker as there was.

"Where's Ray?" she asked. He told her Ray was coming along. "Stopped a minute to set down, trot Frankie. Hurry him up and hurry up them cows."

Crossing the upper pasture she heard music. It came from the brush in the corner of the waste piece, and it was "The Sidewalks of New York." In the midst of it there arose a disturbance. Howls. Yowls of young rage. Words exchanged, high, low, unintelligible at that distance. Addie halted in the bare field. She felt distracted. It was that sudden rent in the fabric of the day, the break in the smooth great throb of all creation.

She fingered her cheeks. "I'll show 'em!" She started that way. Before she had gone far the squabble had quieted and her older son, pushing out of the thicket, climbed over the fence twenty yards away. At sight of her he fetched up, his head ducked a little and his mouth half open.

"Where's your brother?" she demanded with a hint of sharpness.

No answer. Ray looked queer. He looked fascinated, embarrassed, and sullen, and his face was turning a mottled red. He was large for his age and hardly knew how to handle himself.

Addie's feeling of distraction deepened.

"What's ailing you? Why don't you answer me?"

Ray closed his mouth, opened it, closed it again.

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Turning at right angles he started walking heavily and swiftly.

Frankie had appeared now, harmonica in hand. He too stopped short at sight of his mother. Then with a gulp of terror he scuttled back through the fence. She called after him into the brush: "Frankie, you come straight here!" The whole thing shamed and scared her in an unaccountable way; there was nothing to get hold of, no beginning, no why, no wherefore.

Lowering her eyes and pretending to think of something more important than naughty children, she turned back toward the lower lane. At the bars she couldn't help peeping. On the stony profile of the pasture Ray had stopped to watch her, a hulking, sulking silhouette; Frankie, sneaking out of the waste piece farther down, was scuttling up the hill to join him.

But why? But why?

As she brought the cows up in the gathering dusk her feet felt heavy. Nothing any longer kept time; the animals' hoofs clattered on the stones till the wooden jangle got on her nerves and she picked up a stick and drove them.

"Frankie wouldn't come to me; he ran and went with Ray. Why? Why?"

She tried to throw it off at supper, talking more than her habit and laughing at nothing, so that Joslin began to study her, a little puzzled. But it wouldn't work. Ray wouldn't look at her. Chewing to him-

self he kept his eyes on his plate, his face sallow and dark red by turns. And Frankie lay as low as a mouse in a corner, an uneasy good little boy.

After his dessert Ray went upstairs. When his father had gone to the barn he came down in his serge suit and began hunting for his hat. Addie stood watching him. For the first time in her life she wanted to scream.

"Where you aiming to go to?"

He had his hat in his hand and the door open, his back to her.

"Down to the store, see some life; that's where I'm going to."

"Did your Pa say so?"

"What diff's that make to me?" He spit out on the stoop. Then as though that act had fortified him: "What the hell's it to me? If he says anything you can fight it out with him; it's up to you, see? It's up to you!"

Was he turning crazy? Was the boy sick? When Addie tried to get her mind to think she began to grow frightened. Frightened of what?

She went at her dishes. Joslin came in by and by.

"Was that Ray I see going out? Where's he think he's going to?"

"Well, I wanted a spool of cotton down to the store."

"Cotton! Cotton, eh? And him having to be up and down at four!"

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Where was Frankie? Addie went upstairs. She found the boy in bed. Gone of his own accord, undressed without a whine, and fast asleep. When she had been standing there a moment she saw he wasn't asleep at all.

"Please, please," he wailed of a sudden, "please don' spank me wuth no hairbrush!" He pulled the sheet over his head. "I never said ut, honest; I never tol' Ray ut; I never says you kissed 'at man; I never, I never!"

He screeched. But she was only sitting down, weak as water.

So that was the secret. She felt like laughing. Poor Ray! Poor mixed-up fellow, hurt and scared and scandalized! No wonder! Yet what a relief it was to know the why and the wherefore!

She couldn't spank the child; that was too much to ask of her. Giving him a pat and a tuck she returned to the kitchen to wait for Ray. She could almost see his face when she should tell him.

She sat with her hands in her lap and waited. Half hypnotized by the still flame of the lamp she thought and thought. She remembered Ray as a baby; then as a little boy of Frankie's age following her around; then his going away with his father last year on the trip. She hadn't realized till now that from that trip he had never come back. Nor ever would. She remembered him standing there to-night, spitting out, then swearing in a new angry audacious bass. She

began again to have that feeling of helplessness. Little by little it crept and claimed her; why, she couldn't say.

Ray was in and had the door closed before she saw him. Studying his narrowed, bloodshot eyes she got up with a sudden misgiving.

"Come here, le'me smell your breath; you gone and been to Hearn's."

He rubbed a sleeve over his mouth and made for the stairs.

"Ray! Wait!"

Oh, she had never been afraid of anything—of tramps, of bulls, not even of death. But it was this helplessness.

"*Wait!*" she cried in her deep panic. "You listen to me, I know what's ailing you—don't you think I don't!"

He paused on the stair, glowering back. "I betcha."

"Well, you been listening to your brother, I know that, and I know just precisely what he's been feeding you."

"I betcha do." He went on upstairs and slammed his door.

Well, he wasn't himself. Addie sat down on the nearest chair.

Well, she would tell him in the morning.

She didn't tell him in the morning. How to bring it up; how to begin? She was so slow. Nor in the afternoon. She began to find she couldn't get near

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him except when his father was there. Well, why not with his father there? She was so confused, so helpless about it—so worn out by it—well, why rake Joslin in?

Time grew. It grew from hours to days. Five of them.

“What’s ailing Ray?” her husband asked her. “He eats light and he goes around like he’s swallowed a pill. Suppose he’s coming down with something?”

If only she could have said then, matter-of-fact: “Well, he’s got it into his head from something his brother said that a man that was here while you were away, that I kissed him ——” But just there something in her rebelled.

“I don’t know,” was all she could say.

Another time: “I’m getting uneasy about that boy. Couple times to-day I caught him looking like he wanted to murder somebody. What’s ailing him?”

“I don’t know.”

That was true. What did she know any longer about that brooding fellow, that averter and avoider, stranger than the strangest stranger? What did she know about anything? It used to be you plant a seed and reap a crop; you commit a crime and go to prison. Now she had done nothing, yet here she stood from day to day and held her breath. Every time Ray looked at his father, every time Frankie so much as passed his father, blowing that infernal toy, she held her breath.

Yet after all it wasn't to come directly from either Frankie or Ray.

Addie was sorting the last of the apples one afternoon. Joslin had been to the store. She heard the car return and a moment later he came into the shed. He sat down and began to eat an apple, a thing he never did; after a bite or so he threw it on the ground and rushed out, only to return, his face contorted and his eyes narrowed. He stood with arms folded.

"Wife, what's all this talk I hear down to the Crossing?"

"Who?"

"I want you should tell me what you got to tell me, plain out."

His voice was obstructed. He spoke slowly, evidently determined to get to the bottom of this thing in a cold-blooded, judicial way. It was worse than any rage. It took all Addie's wits out of her.

"Wh-why, I don't know wh-wh-what—wh-wh-what talk?"

All right. He had done his part, given her her chance, fulfilled his obligations as a reasoning man. Let unreason have its way.

"Who was he? You tell me that, or Goll-damn it!" Then he gave her no time. Pointing a fist at her he lifted his lip, showing the points of his teeth. "I want you to tell me, wife; how long was he here with you, on my farm?" All of his teeth became visible, brown

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at the bases. "I want you to tell me: what else did you give him besides your kisses?"

Addie wouldn't have known him; he wouldn't have known himself. Wheeling, he walked out of the shed and around the corner of the barn.

No one could blame him. It's terrible enough to ferret such things out in the home: but to get the first inkling at secondhand outside—common property, common gossip bandied over a counter or around a stove!

Addie nailed up the last box of the "Selected." She walked across the yard. Frankie came out of the kitchen door with doughnut crumbs on his cheek and, seeing her, began to play furiously on his rusting instrument. She took it and threw it on the steps and stamped on it. The child opened his mouth; presently the howl came out. Still knowing as little what she did, Addie grabbed him, sat down, held him in her lap, and patted his arm.

"There, there; but now see what you gone and done."

Ray came across the yard. She turned her voice on him.

"Now see what you done. Harkening to foolishness; running to the store and gabbing lies. Now see what you gone and done."

"What *I* done!" Ray sunk his head between his shoulders. "*I* done! That's a good one, that is." He spit to his left and went on in.

The first half of supper passed in silence; it took all that time for Addie to get her words in order. She got up and stood by the sink.

"Listen, the whole lot of you's just going on something Frankie took into his head, and I should think it had come to a pass when you'll swallow for gospel what a baby his age says, and won't even hark to a grown woman you've lived with going on nineteen year."

Joslin raised his eyes for the first time. He looked lined and gray.

"That just the damn part of it. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklin's." He leaned heavily on his elbows and drummed with a knife. "For instance; if I and Frankie there, we'd been to town, and you was to ask me who I'd seen, and I says nobody, and he was to chirp in, 'Oh, no, papa, I guess you're forgetting that woman in the red hat you followed out back of the church shed and put your arm around her'—which 'd you take for the gospel, Addie?"

Addie turned and screamed at Frankie: "Tell 'em the truth! Tell 'em everything happened! Go on tell 'em every last thing you seen!"

Joslin pointed the knife. "Yes, Frankie, now, everything. Mind now, *everything*! Or else, you know, you could go be put in prison."

The child looked at his mother, then at his father, then at his brother; and his brother too was scowling at him in the same silent, awful way. He began to

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quaver: "I don' want 'at ol' mouf organ—I never—I never ——" and then he was under the table in a heap of fright and woe.

Joslin looked at his plate. He pushed it away from him and got up.

"It tastes dirty." He took his hat and went out. Ray followed.

If Addie could have seen anything she might have been able to see red. But for a while she saw nothing. She stood at the window that night looking out; there was no moon and the stars were clouded and she couldn't even see the farm. Joslin's farm. "How long was he here with you, on *my* farm?" Was the reason she couldn't see it from the window that, in the superhuman violence of his anger, he had torn it up and taken it away?

Her mind had been knocked down; it lay stunned and subservient to the beliefs of others. What was this sin she had committed? How had she, Addie Shoemaker, ever come to do it?

Addie Shoemaker! As she crept in between the blankets, chill with emptiness, the one thing she knew was nostalgia. The house had grown frightening in its silence, hung there over the mountain void from which the farm had been torn away in a shamed man's wrath. If she could only have heard Mama Shoemaker's voice downstairs, reading the *Sentinel*, or Papa Shoemaker's horses stamping in the livery stable out back.

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Joslin slept with his son. Addie, coming down half drugged with a snatch of sleep, found they had got their own breakfast and were gone about their business. She heard their axes across in the waste piece when she took the cows down.

The forenoon grew. With each hour that passed she sank deeper and deeper into the lethargy of the lost. Habit worked her hands. She got a good dinner—home sausage, mashed potatoes, stewed tomatoes, squash pie, baking-powder biscuit last. It was ready to the minute. She let Frankie ring the bell.

Ray was in the yard but he didn't come. Then she remembered Joslin had gone off in the car at eleven. He was returning just now. They came in together, the father carrying two paper bags and a can.

"Well, dinner's on." She fastened Frankie's bib and sat down.

The men went to the sink. Joslin opened his can of pork and beans. In one bag there were crackers, in the other cup cakes. Standing there by the drain board they made their meal.

Addie sat and stared. There was something about this act that took away what little she had left of her powers. Her husband's face fascinated her. Under its stubble the skin looked hot and dry. But never a word.

Ray wasn't the man his father was. His mouth full of cracker paste, he couldn't keep his eyes from slipping to the fleshpots on the table. Caught by his

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mother he reddened and lost his poise. "Taste dirty, 'twould."

His father gave him a look to slay him. "Hush your mouth!"

Then Joslin hushed his own; he stopped chewing. He stared at the pump. He had suddenly envisioned the years to come. His mouth still full, he went outdoors, to return presently with a peach-butter can he had found in the dump. Bringing from the pantry a jar of concentrated lye he emptied it into the can, which he then proceeded to fill from the pump. All his movements were deliberate. He turned to his wife.

"See this? This is lye water. Well, if so be you want to go on cooking for this family, come wash your hands."

"Come—what?"

"Come wash your hands."

Addie didn't "see red"; she saw white. Where the other blow had stunned her mind, this cleared it. Clear as zero ice. Her voice sounded flat.

"You say you want I should wash my hands in that?"

Joslin inclined his head. Her eyes left his and played over the table, resting for a moment on the heavy castor, for another on the broad blade of the meat knife. Strange, rushing impulses. Fearful speculations. Lusts.

She heard her husband's voice: "Here 'tis; I'll leave it here."

"You can leave it there till hell freezes over."

Frankie gasped at the word. Joslin went to the door. "If it takes that long, so be it, wife."

When he and Ray were gone she got Frankie from his chair. She couldn't keep her hands from shaking. She pushed him out of the door, away from her. "Go with 'em! Catch 'em! Stay with 'em! Play down there!"

She put the knife away in the drawer. Then she scraped the untouched plates, carried the food out to the sows, and watched them swill it.

She went to her room and lay down. She remained there staring at the ceiling till she was exhausted with the muscular strain of rigidity; then she got up and prepared supper. She worked all around the peach-butter can but did not disturb it. She set the table with cold meat, potato chips, pickled beets, raspberry sauce, cookies, pie, doughnuts, cheese, and put the kettle on for tea. Into the kettle she stuck her thumb.

Frankie was eating all alone when she came in after milking and the others had gone to the store. She took all the food to the sows, put Frankie to bed, and went to bed herself after bolting the door. Once in the night a terrible loneliness came over her. She went on tiptoe and got Frankie. Almost as soon as she had him in bed, however, she began to shake all over again with the murderous license of her thoughts, and returned him to his room. When she awoke in the morning it was broad day. What matter?

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So it went.

Hitherto, even when the men were away she had been surrounded by, and one with, the multitudinous life of the farm: the fields, the stock, the child. But now she felt so queerly about Frankie that she grew afraid; and as for the farm, she hated it. It *was* Joslin's farm; it had been his before she came; it believed what he believed and looked at her askance with its hundred kinds of eyes as she went up and down—the foolish town girl, the wicked one.

She was alone on the farm. She hadn't had time yet to think of the outside world. One afternoon, however, two separate parties of her friends drove that way along the road. They didn't stop at the gate, only slowed down, necks craned and eyes slanting back at the house in morbid fascination.

And that evening at dusk when she went for the cows there were three men at the bottom of the pasture. They climbed in as she approached and when she would have turned back and avoided them, one took hold of her arm. Though it wasn't cold they had on overcoats with collars turned up, and their hats pulled down, so she could make nothing of their faces.

It was so fantastic she wasn't actually frightened. When the first one spoke, she said: "You're Albert Pease, from Lower Falls."

"You're mistaken," he growled. "We're more-less strangers this side of the county. But we know Joslin by reputation; we know what he's done with this farm;

we know what he stands for in this community; and there's times outsiders can do more'n neighbors can. What we want to say is, this here's always been a God-fearing, law-abiding community, and it ain't going to begin winking at goings-on behind husbands' backs at this late date, nor at homes going to rack and ruin and men interfered with in raising this nation's crops, by no stubborn, unholy, un-Christian goings-on."

The second man broke in. "A word to the wise is sufficient."

The third: "Get along in the home, or get out of it."

When they let her go and went back toward the fence she looked about in a sort of daze. There was a chunk of rock near her feet; she picked it up and threw it. It struck one man in the small of the back. With the shock and hurt of it he wheeled and started for her, fists clenched, but the others caught him, expostulating in whispers. He puffed at her: "You—you—we'll get you yet, you——" But then one got a hand over his mouth.

She left the cows and ran home. With every step it grew darker and the footing steeper; her chest ached with the bursting of her lungs. When she came into the kitchen her face was red, her lips white, her hair in strings; she looked drunk; she had it in her mind to scream, scream, scream, and nothing more. Then she didn't. Flopping down on the nearest chair she surveyed the room. Of the supper she had left on the table not even Frankie's portion was touched, and the

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boy himself hid in shadow halfway up the stairs. Joslin sat against the farther wall with his hands in his lap and his best coat on over his overalls. Ray wore his too, and sat with his hands folded. And in a third chair, with his hands folded, sat the minister.

Addie had never been so embarrassed. She tried to stop panting and she couldn't; her face flamed; she dropped her eyes to the table legs.

"How d'you do," she mumbled, "please to see you."

"I'm pleased to see you, Sister Joslin, I'm sure. As I was saying" . . .

He was a hard-working fellow, their minister, a lean man on a meager living, a little worried head and a big worried heart.

"As I was saying to Brother Joslin, I just dropped in going by. I often drop in on one or another of my people's homes, just simply without any fuss to kneel down in the family circle for a minute and talk with God, as you'd talk with your neighbor. It seems to me there's no prayer in any great tabernacle with stained glass and gilded steeple so helpful, so curative, nor so acceptable to our Father in Heaven as that." He got up suddenly and straightened his vest. "Might we pray?"

Addie couldn't budge; something held her. Tears burned her eyes. She choked: "I never done a thing—it's all lies, I keep telling you, telling you!" The minister's hand fell on her shoulder, firm and kindly.

"You and God know the truth of that, Sister, surely.

But anyway, what about just talking it over with God? That's never harmed a living soul since the world was made. . . . Well, men?" He looked at the others who, appearing sober, impressed, and scared, got down with him by their chairs.

Still Addie couldn't budge. The minister popped up again, darted at the stairs and, catching Frankie with a reassuring chuckle, brought him down and planted him on petrified knees with his elbows in his mother's lap. Then he got back to his place and began: "Oh, God, our Heavenly Father" . . .

Those backs! It was too queer and too awful. Freeing Frank's elbows she slid to the floor. She didn't kneel—just hunkered there, her arm on the chair seat. The good man's voice, husky with the habit of supplication, filled the room with its immemorial sedative phrases. From beyond it, beyond the walls, came the supplication of the unmilked cows, lowing at the bars. Addie's muscles slackened. Under the influence of the harmonious repetitions her thoughts slackened too, lost focus, and became a hodge-podge.

"In Thine infinite mercy" . . . "Mooo-ugh! Mooo-ugh!" . . . "goings-on behind husbands' backs" . . . "Mooo-ugh!" . . . "Vouchsafe that whichever of us is in darkness" . . . The lamp was smoking. . . . The kettle was singing. . . . Somebody was sobbing. . . . "Mooo-ugh" . . . She had hit him with a chunk of rock. Good! . . . "Father be good to us, little children that don't know their A-B-C's. Teach

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us, Oh, Great Teacher" . . . Somebody was sobbing . . .

Addie lifted her head. Something had happened. What had happened was that a spirit had come into the room. The minister had forgotten in his worryment what he was doing; forgotten his calling, forgotten his husk; his voice had grown strident, insistent: "God, let's wipe it clean; let's look each other in the eye and see the truth and tell it and have the dirty business over with and begin all new again. There, that's right, that's right."

It was Ray sobbing. Frankie blubbered. Addie put her hand on his head. Little Frankie, little baby! And all of them! All gathered around the table again discussing the fields, the smiling fields, the fattening stock. All straight in the loving light of God again; all new.

"Amen."

They got up, all new. Joslin blew his nose. How worn to the bone he looked. It was funny to see his face wet with tears. He walked to the sink, still blowing his nose. He looked at the peach-butter can, still there, still full. Was he going, was he going—Oh, Glory, was he going to dump it out?

"There, yes, brother, vengeance is mine saith the Lord, there, there. . . ."

"Mooo-ugh . . . Mooo-ugh." . . .

Joslin didn't dump it. Before they knew what he

The Man Who Saw

was about, there went both his own hands into it, right down to the coat cuffs.

"There's for anything I may've done ever," he whistled through his teeth as he withdrew the hands, gray with the caustic that dripped on the linoleum. "Son," he said, turning to Ray, "if so be you got anything ——"

The overgrown boy had been through an overgrown hell these weeks. His diaphragm collapsed; he too ducked his hands to the cuffs; he too stood with them streaming. What deliverance! What brightness! Supper to-night!

And Addie was thinking, her eyes blind with water: "Supper to-night!"

"Well, wife?"

Through the blur she saw them watching, waiting. Their eyes went to the peach-butter can and came back to her again. Well, Ma? Well, wife?

While she stood there trying to fathom it the minister came softly and, taking one of Frankie's hands, curled its fingers around her thumb.

" 'A little child shall lead them.' "

"*Not on your life!*"

For an instant after that their faces looked so blank it was comic. Then the heavenly bubble that filled the room was shattered and the air was thick.

"You won't, won't you!" Joslin spread his smarting hands on the table. Ray bawled: "You double-crosser, you!" And Joslin again: "*You won't, eh?*"

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"Not till hell freezes over, I won't!"

Before the distracted arm of the minister could catch her she had the door opened, and slammed again behind her as she ran.

She stood panting in the middle of the yard, her knees half bent. A crescent moon in the west threw a phantom light across the world. She saw the white faces of the cows all staring at her across the bars at the lane, their black mouths all gaping at her. "Mooo-ugh!"

Turning, she fled around the corner of the house and down the path and out the gate and down the road that led to the valley of the Twinskill where she was born. . . .

Winter came and covered the mountain. In the short days the sun shone and there were occasional sounds. The long nights were silent. For a while in the early evening there was a light in the farmhouse on the ridge, but by eight it was gone. In the town of Twinshead, miles away but distinct in the bodiless air, lights burned in clusters till nine and ten and eleven.

November, December, January, February, March.

In late March a snow flurry met a cross wind and fell as rain. Another week and the gulleys were running water. Around the rags of drifts the earth seemed visibly to puff up, reawakened and wishful. One evening when Ray had got a mock of supper huddled together on the table and was about to light the

lamp, he looked and blew out the match instead; a shaft of pale magenta standing in at the windows from the west was enough to eat by. Spring had come.

With the coming of spring and the prying of light, the ravages of winter began to show themselves—to the eye, the nose, the cheated palate; even to the ear. When the beasts began to bawl, Frankie, who had been stupid all through the cold like any little animal that hibernates, began too. First to sniffle and then eternally, causelessly, to wail. Threats did no good.

His wailing wasn't the worst. He began to talk about his mother.

"When's my Mama coming home?"

"Hush your face and eat your supper."

"When's my Mama coming home?"

When nothing else served they sent him to bed. But next night as soon as it darkened he was at it again: "When's my Mama coming home?"

His father was a man; he could set his face like frozen leather and sit quiet behind it. But Ray couldn't. His nerves set him on the child.

"Your Mama? You ain't got no Mama, didn't you know that?"

"Ray," said his father, "eat! Think we want to be up all night?"

"Nothing I'd like better." Ray hulked over his plate for a few mouthfuls. But his nerves only got worse. An embittered restlessness pushed him to bravado. "Nothing I'd like better'n staying up all

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night once. I betcha one thing; I betcha Ma ain't going to bed no half-past seven or eight these nights in Twinshead. Huh-huh! Not Ma."

It kept at him. Doing the dishes later he resumed the attack.

"Not her, no sir! She knows when she's well off, I warrant you. Seeing everybody, tending shop for Aunt Hattie in the hat store, hearing everything going. And Aunt Hattie gives parties, too. Know what I heard to the store? Aunt Hattie give one party that Uncle Albert had every car from his garage lining the sidewalk to take the folks home. Don't you forget it, Pa!"

His father was reading the *Sentinel*.

"I won't forget it," he said in a steady careful voice, "if *you will*."

Forget it! Ray had planted the wind in his own soul; the whirlwind had him. Parties and cars, bright lights and goings-on. He couldn't sleep for thinking of them; all next morning was wishful bitterness. Springtime! It was he that ought to be out with the fellows and girls, and looking well, instead of penned in this makeshift life of two-legged pigs. With the afternoon a wild and weakling resolve took form. Well, he didn't care.

He got away; ran away, he didn't care. He went down to the store at the Crossing where there was a telephone booth. He got his aunt's house. His

mother was at the hat store. He got the hat store. He didn't care.

"Ma, it's Ray. Ma, you having a good time?"

"Oh, Ray—yes, Ray; how are you, and how's Frankie?"

"He's all right. Ma, you having a nice time down there?"

"How's everything? How's the hay holding out? How's the cows, and have any of 'em come in yet? How are the hens for eggs?"

"All right, yes, O.K.; but you wouldn't fancy it up here, the good time you're having."

"Your Pa still got the lye can waiting?"

"Ma, listen here, I'll dump it. I will! I will!"

"Your Pa wouldn't like that."

"I'm bigger'n Pa, Ma. I'm stouter'n Pa."

"Where's the use? Maybe you might see me dropping in, though."

"Ma! No! No, honest, Ma! Say, Ma——"

"Maybe it might be soon. Soon's to-night, maybe."

Ray got home breathless, praying his father hadn't yet come in. Luck was with him. For the last time he pawed together the leavings of things for their evening meal. The last time. Last time.

Frankie was at it again. "When's my Mama coming home?"

Ray paled. "Didn't I tell you you hadn't got no Mama?" His breathlessness wouldn't go. He made a saving to-do of getting his brother to bed, pulling

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the soiled blankets over him for the last time, for the last time.

His father was reading the *Sentinel*; he had read it seven times through in seven nights. Ray didn't wait to be told, he went at the dishes with a clatter. Puddling in the pan, he hadn't a thing in his mind but one—and that was as big as a mountain. A mountain at his elbow. There it stood, the peach-butter can, still in the same ring of dried slosh on the drain board, still full, each week's loss by evaporation made good with a dipper from the pump, as sure as church.

Hurry! Time was passing; no time to lose. At last he touched it with an accidental thumb. But not yet. He felt blown up like a Fair balloon.

"Pa," he tried at last, his face hot red, "this here can of slop here, it smells. How long we going to keep it, for Goll sake?"

Joslin turned a page and coughed. His bald spot looked sweaty but his voice was dry. "You heard her say herself. Till hell freezes over."

Time was passing. Ray thought once he heard a car in the distance. He looked at his father over his shoulder. "I'm bigger'n him, and stouter."

It was true, and he had never realized it till to-day. His father there was an old man. An old man with stooped shoulders and only a few hairs left, and they white, all in a season. A big bluff. He cleared his throat.

"Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do; I'm going to dump it."

He laid hands on the sacred can. Then he let go, wheeled, and swallowed.

His father was halfway across the floor. He stopped with his feet wide apart and his jaw out. He began swearing in a low voice, words Ray had never heard. His veins stood out on his temples and his eyes looked crazy. Where was Ray's bulk and muscle now? He hadn't figured on this. He hadn't seen what his father looked like till to-day; he hadn't seen what his father *was* till now. He went around the other way of the table, wiping his hands on his pants, and sat down; and still he couldn't get away from those crazy eyes or from that low-toned, almost whispering voice.

"You meal-mouthed sissy; you son of something—no son of mine; you white-gutted skunk; you—you——"

At the full of it the door had opened and Addie stood there in it, a suit case in either hand.

"Well?" she said.

In the silence, in the dark of the yard there was the sound of an engine and a crackle of frosted mud as tires backed, turned, and gathered way, and at the last a dying hail: "So long, good-by."

"Well?" She set the suit cases down, closed the door, and faced them.

Ray sat there like a lump. He hadn't emptied the

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can; what could he do or say? Then there came a new dread. If she were to let anything out; if ever his father were to know about that telephone! He sat up. He tried to wink. He began to stammer, "How'd you c-c-come, Ma? If you'd 've told me I could 've dr-dr-drove down."

"Oh, no bother about that. A friend kindly offered to bring me up. Mr. Hedge, a gentleman that works for your Uncle Albert in the garage, he was so good as to drive me up. He's been very good to me this winter, Mr. Hedge has."

She returned her eyes to the wooden image of Joslin.

"Well?"

She looked so queer. So strange. She had on a nice dress that fitted her, a nice hat, and brown kid gloves which she began now to pull off, her hands looking white under them as they appeared. She seemed to have lost some flesh but she had good color, high color, and her eyes were bright.

"Well?" she said for the fourth time. "Where's Frankie—in bed? I brought him a present; isn't it pretty?" She had it out in her hand, a bright, brand-new harmonica. "I hope he'll like it and be satisfied."

Joslin stirred. He ran a sleeve over his mouth and backed away two or three stiff steps till he stood by the drain board. His eyes still looked crazy and his voice was still low, almost a whisper.

"Well, you keep on saying 'Well?' Well what? Has hell froze over?"

"Oh, yes. Oh, long ago."

If there was anything on her face it was like a smile.

"Well, wife?"

"Oh, yes." She walked to the drain board and, laying her gloves and the harmonica among the dishes, she dipped her hands into the lye, then drew them out and held them away to dribble on the floor. A spot of pink lay on either cheek bone and her eyes were as shiny as dry diamonds.

"Now," she said in a queer light voice, "I hope we're all satisfied."

It was too sudden for Joslin and too complete; the strain of being adamant when he was only flesh-and-blood had been too long. All he could do was blow his nose and mumble: "There, Addie my girl, good girl. . . ."

Ray went to pieces too. With him it was all the winter's bitterness. His face down in his hands, he cried: "Aw, if you was going to do it, why for Goll sake couldn't you've done it last fall and had it done with, Ma?"

Addie had a slow brain. She stared at happy Joslin, then at Ray.

"Why couldn't I ——" She stopped there. A slow brain, but it arrived.

Another moment and the room was filled with a soft sound of laughter.

She left them and went upstairs. She passed into

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Frankie's room and stood looking down at him in the little moonlight from the window.

The thought came to her: "You'd say I ought to kneel down." But she didn't; she sat on the bed's edge. "I oughtn't to give him this, or at least I should think I'd think I oughtn't." But she slid the new harmonica under his pillow. "I'd always have supposed I'd have cried for shame." She bent and kissed his hair and went to her own room.

She stood at the window gazing out. Under the moon the farm sloped away, gently swelling smooth fields like pale breasts on the mountain against the black hem of the woods below.

The thought that came to her in the top layer was: We'll sow it in rye this year; I like the green of rye growing; the oats can go in the waste piece. But that's so—there isn't any waste piece any more.

In the bottom layer of her thoughts was this: I'll make it yield because it belongs to me; it's part of me—the land, the stock, the men. But I'm not part of it. I'm not its property; I'm my own. I can go have a time in town with George and them, or I can stay here. And because I want to stay here, I'll stay, and I'll make it yield.

"How 'd you like some buckwheat cakes to go to bed on?" she called down presently from the top of the stairs. . . .

AUTUMN BLOOM

VIII

A U T U M N B L O O M

SHE was really and truly stunned from the beginning. When her husband's partner came in to stammer his tidings it did that; it stunned her. It is a fact that all the actual pain she was to have that day was compressed into the seconds *before* he opened his mouth. An on-coming shadow can strike an awful blow. When he said, "Cora, something terrible has happened," her mind began, as fighters say, to "cover up." By the time he had finished, "There's been an explosion on the *City of Toledo*," the act of defense was complete.

Cora Sailor faced him for a moment with a look absurdly like the one a woman gives to an accosting stranger; then, turning away, walked through the dining room to the kitchen. Oscar Few had to follow her there.

"I wonder if you understand, Cora. There aren't so—there are hardly any—survivors. And Bill—William—Cora, for Heaven's *sake!* So far Bill hasn't been located."

The Finnish servant, who was rolling out bread biscuit for dinner, understood all right, even though she didn't half know English. She said something in her own tongue, put a fist of red knuckles to her mouth,

and ran off into the pantry. Her mistress called after her, "Elia!" in a sharp voice, and then began to puddle with the dough herself. "Oh, William! Oh, *William's* all right. Don't you worry about my husband; *he* can take care of himself."

So it went all through that day. Since it was all dreaming, she soon grew slothful; she who was so active she kept but one servant, where others with her means had three. The unmade bed in their bedroom, one pillow rumpled, was too much; she put it off till later. In curious *sabotage* she drifted about the house or stood behind the shades in the reception room, looking out at the people loitering on the sidewalk at the bottom of the lawn. The wife of W. A. Sailor, she knew pretty nearly all of them; the town pretty well lived by the Sailor-Few Planing Mills. And if nothing else had proved the day a dream, these people would have done so. They neither moved on nor came in; or if they came in they didn't come anywhere near her.

Except Oscar Few. Oscar seemed bent on making her believe him real. Every little while he would say, "Don't you think we'd best wire Steve to come?"

"Why?" It was still September; her boy had hardly more than got back and settled into his college year. Why, simply on account of nightmare——

At last Few said, "I've *wired* Steve."

"Well—all right."

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"Wired him to meet us at the President in Toledo to-morrow morning."

"Toledo! Why, we're not——"

"Yes, Cora. Try now to put some things in a bag—or else let Alma Knowles here—Alma, do you suppose you could pack a bag for Cora?"

"No, Oscar! No, Alma! No!"

"Yes, Cora, yes. They're bringing—they—into Toledo."

"Oh, I *wish* you could get it through your heads that William is all right. I know William better than all of you put together, and I *know*!"

"Will you go in the morning then? It'll be awful early starting."

She got away from them. In the front hall there were people. She felt like protesting, "What a nerve!" She knew now how folks felt who found picnickers littering up their land. Some one had a paper; huge headlines, "THREE MORE SURVIVORS REACH SHORE ON WRECKAGE AT CAMPORT. Divers at Work on Sunken Hulk of *City of Toledo*, Ohio State Lumber Dealers' Excursion Boat, Had Recovered Seventeen Bodies at 2 p. m. Improvised Morgue at City Sealer's. Relatives of Disaster Victims, Many Prominent, Rushing Here from All Points. President Wires Condolences." What a nerve!

She went upstairs and back through to the sleeping porch. Resting against the rail, she looked out to-

ward the lake. The sun was setting; for a moment after it had vanished its light seemed magnified in its afterglow, simplified and tranquilized. Enwrapped in it, the figure of the woman seemed to take on an enhanced quietude, an illusion of serenity in itself luminous.

Blond, slightly under the medium in stature, not so much faded as smoothed out and disaccented by the patina of joys and sorrows, gains and losses, deposited by her twenty-three years of married life, she might have stood as an image symbolical of woman's achievement, as the wife of a husband and the mother of sons.

"William is all right," she said.

The sky was turning green above the water. Presently it would turn deep blue and the stars would appear. Last night by the starshine, far out there, William had gone by in the excursion steamer. To-day? Well, to-day he would have been finishing his quarter's business in the city.

What business? She had known all about William's business in the early days, as William had known all about little Billy, who died, and about Stephen as a child. But the life of "two in one flesh" grows like anything else, from simplicity toward complexity and specialization; the trick is to keep it still unity to the end. This she could say she had done. This was why she knew William was alive. For if

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he were dead there would be nothing for her to do but die too. And then what of Stephen?

"William is all right."

Half dazed all day, she paid for it at night, lying broad awake, her faculties alert in the dark. Forbidden to worry about one thing, she let herself worry about dozens. Alma Knowles was in the guest chamber (why *will* folks believe they're helping when they're only in the way?) and everything about the guest chamber was wrong. It was in a mess. Elia had set the alarm clock, but had she released the catch? Was the front door bolted, if anyone wanted to get in? There wasn't any cream for coffee, and Oscar took cream——

She decided finally she was going mad unless she could drop off into a doze. And some time, just before she was dropping from sheer exhaustion, she heard a creaking of feet. She heard William come up the front stairs quietly, so as not to awaken her. She heard him pass through Stephen's room to the bathroom and close the door.

Why didn't she get up and run and open it and cry, "For the love of Heaven, where *have* you *been*?" She couldn't. She lay like a cataleptic, simply listening. More with her nerves than with her ears she seemed to follow the hidden processes—his undressing, draping his garments anywhere, his scalp-rubbing with the dandruff stuff that would presently be leaving a spot on the pillow slip, his teeth-brushing, interminable

(since Dr. Stout had frightened him)—all that nightly campaign of defense rather than cleanliness, which, devoted as she was, she profoundly hated in the man.

He could never understand this. Besides being the male, he had been brought up in a less fastidious home than hers—"mind above body, and spirit above both." Either he was amused at what he conceived to be her "showing off" or he was obscurely hurt, muttering to himself, "You'd think there was something criminal about having your gums recede on you!" The thing that made him sore was that when she asked him to change his underwear or wash his feet she did it so painfully. What he couldn't comprehend was that it *was* painful, and that in the bottom of her feminine heart she felt the shame of it hideously.

When she heard him coming out of the bathroom into the hall she began to breathe hard, with her mouth open.

"Cora! Are you awake?" It wasn't William; it was Oscar. "Are you awake, Cora? It's about time you were getting up, if we make that train."

Her headache was never done. Here, for sixty hours, was somnambulism. All she was to remember of those two days and a night in Toledo might have been written in a crazy category. More than anything else she might have been a camera carried around by some careless tripper, whose sleeve, brushing the shutter lever from time to time, allowed a scene, vivid

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and fortuitous, to split for an instant the aching blackness of her brain.

An elevator. Oscar's necktie, black with green squares. Taxi. Stephen's eyes and the queer furrows between them. A cavernous building, strangely scented. The body of a man. Part of the body of another man. A trousers bottom, the cuff wilted down over the shoe. "But William isn't here; William's all right." Taxi. A tray of food. "You must eat something." "Well, if you say." Consequent nausea. "It's my head, Stephen, my head!" Better. Taxi. A body. Part of another. Until the very physical force to grow rigid against crisis was all used up. Until when the moment came there wasn't so much horror, or terror, or even for the moment grief, as there was the sense of the possibility of caving in at last, of going blind, of sliding downhill into the blind beatitude of finality.

"Yes, it's he. Yes, Oscar, yes, I know the coat. Yes, he was wearing that ring, his Elk ring. *Yes, it's William.* Oscar, Stephen, why will you make me go on talking, looking, when I—I must be taken away?"

Taxi. The smallest taxi, pressing the three of them together till there was no air left. Back at the hotel room, with Cora's last strength:

"Why did you make me do this?"

"Why—why, Cora—we had to know."

"Know! Don't you suppose I knew? Don't you suppose, from the instant you came in the other morn-

ing with that look in your eyes—before you even uttered a word—don't you suppose, in here, in my heart, I've *known*?"

"Mother, dear, now lie down."

She lay down across the bed. Then tears flowed from her eyes. As if the fluid, too long dammed in her head, were what had made it ache, little by little the ache went away. So room was made for grief, and, beyond grief, for the edge of coming loneliness.

Cora didn't feel the whole of that loneliness till she was taking off her things before her mirror on her return from the funeral to the empty house. The house wasn't empty, of course, since Stephen was there, but he was still a child in her mind, still dependent upon *her*. Moreover, abashed as youth will be in face of sorrow, he had made haste to shut himself in his own room, leaving his mother to "rest a little while."

Studying the mirror, she realized for the first time the proportions of her loss. She had lost not only her husband: she had lost herself. She wouldn't have known this woman. Perhaps it was the contrast between the new blackness of weeds and the new whiteness of her face, in which the eyes appeared unfamiliarly dark and large and (odd fancy) Spanish. Whatever it was, it was arresting. She hadn't known, till she grew self-conscious, how frightened she was.

She had never realized how dependent upon William she had come to be, the surrenders of her freedom of action had been so gradual and so small. Mistress

Through Heaven

of the house, she had almost forgotten it was the house that William built. And now that the walls were down of a sudden and the out-of-doors looking in, she knew that there was one thing she wanted fearfully, and that was to have hold of a hand.

When she prayed to God after that for "a guiding hand," the one she meant, without thinking it, had big knuckles and nails cut back a good eighth-inch from the finger ends and wanting a little soap and water maybe—but who cared? The thing that mattered was that she had reached a place where she knew a prayer she prayed would not be answered; only when she was dropping off and three-quarters into dream could she sometimes recapture the word of faith, "Who knows?" Sometimes she would start up from that, wide-eyed. "*William!*" More than once in the dark she put a hand quickly to the pillow on William's side of the bed. "God, give him back!" No one on earth would have been less apt to see ghosts than Cora Sailor. But, after all, they had lived in that house for eighteen years, and there were times in sleepless nights when she forgot to remember to forget.

Once, lying cold, she heard reënacted the illusion of the first night. Except that there was no Oscar to "hang it on" the business was the same: the creaking of the stairs, the soft-footed passage through the room where Stephen slept, the opening and easing shut of the bathroom door, the flop of garments, clink of bottles—interminable bottles, curative, palliative, prophy-

lactic—the brushings—the definitive whine of water on a falling key. Not till she felt him standing in the black of the hall were her limbs unbound and realities given back.

There had been about enough of that. With a resolution born of need she went into the bathroom, turned on the light, shut the door, and set about doing what she would have done long before had it not been for the procrastination that was part of her bewilderment. She couldn't actually throw the things away at that time of night, but at least she could get them all into a pasteboard box, ready to be disposed of in the morning.

It was ruthless, but it had to be ruthless at last. The corn razor, the second toothbrush (the first, she tried not to remember, was at the lake's bottom), the bottle of dandruff killer, the tin of breath tablets, three tubes of pyorrhea paste in various stages of curl, three bottles of oil, one animal, one vegetable, one mineral. In a sense more actual than the other and formal one had been, this was the act of burial. The hole behind the sheets in the linen cupboard that received the box for hiding was truly the grave.

She returned to bed with a feeling she wouldn't have said she ought to have, one of relief following on release. If there are haunting ghosts, the only reason they haunt us is that they are held by something we forget to cut.

Through Heaven

"I must stand on my own feet," she said aloud. "I must go forward."

In the morning she set about making the severance still more complete. She removed the cuspidor, the rustic ash stand, the cigar boxes, and the old magazines from the "den" and stuffed them away in the closet under the stairs. In the reception room there were two portraits. One, an enlargement in an oval frame, was above the mantel. It wasn't William: it was William of more than a decade ago; somehow it needn't bother her. The photograph standing on the corner cabinet, however, was a recent one. Taken on his fiftieth birthday, it showed him "in the life," the mustache longer, more stained, and less firm than in the other, the forehead bearing traces of the retouching brush that had blurred the creases between the brows, the throat beginning to cave a little around the Adam's apple. This one she felt it in her instinct to put away.

But then she thought. People don't understand. And she didn't dare.

People say so many things. They said, "Stevie doesn't seem to be getting back to college; but poor Cora, it's only natural she should want him with her a little while." In truth, as much as she did want him with her, she didn't. He was the world that was left her; he was her beloved boy, but he was a boy. He worked hard at being the consoler, the broad-shouldered man of the narrowed house. The trouble was

that she knew enough about boys to realize he was doing just that, working hard.

No, the only thing that had got in the way of telling him to go was a curious sloth. No, it was worse than that; worse than being unable to make a decision. Just for the time she had lost the trick of believing it mattered whether he went to college or didn't go, or succeeded in this life or failed. And because she stood in the slough and didn't thrash, people said, "Cora's taking it well."

It remained for Oscar Few to startle the question into life.

"But *is* Stevie going back? I don't want to butt in, Cora, but if he's going to learn the business—— Listen, Cora, I been wanting to discuss this with you. The fact is, if Bill had to be taken, Heaven knows he couldn't have been taken an awkwarder time. Maybe you know it—things were changing. Outgrown ourselves, that's all. Ready to go, but not sure where. Though, Cora, I got a hunch, if Bill had been spared, five years from now the Sailor-Few Mills would've been handling the bulk of the biggest-growing thing in this State—portable houses. Bill had the lines laid. Bill's gone, and it's caught us kind of all sprawled out. *I'm* left, and look at me."

Cora knew he was right. He hadn't the driving power his partner had had, nor the singleness of aim. He had never married; perhaps that was why. He liked to live. He was fond of dressing well and mix-

Through Heaven

ing with people, and that's apt to make a fellow easy-going. Where William's had been gray, Oscar's hair was still full brown, and if he wasn't exactly fat he was at least comfortable. He was just simply Oscar Few.

"I don't want to butt in, I say. You think it over, though. Hash it over with Steve. And couldn't you and him drop down to the office to-morrow some time? Mrs. Wilde will be there."

At the conference next day Stephen was the dazed one. He didn't know how to feel. Imagine a football squad starting out in September on the long grind toward late November and the one big game. And imagine it announced that the game was set forward, two months and a half—to to-morrow——

When, after some talk, Oscar took Stephen on a ramble through the works, Cora and Mrs. Wilde, the secretary, were left alone. Mrs. Wilde, a divorcée from Cleveland, was the only woman in town who showed her ears. She truly felt for this self-commanding, white-cheeked widow of her late employer.

"Mrs. Sailor," she said, "I've been wanting to tell you how really and deeply a personal loss I've felt in your husband's going. Here I never had the feeling of employer and employee; we were much more like just good pals. And I've the more reason to feel it deeply because I think I was the only one here at the mills who really appreciated Mr. Sailor for what he was.

I suppose it's always like that—the prophet in his own country. And then, too, of course I was more on the inside of what your husband was doing and planning—dreaming. For he was a dreamer; he truly was.

“Of course *you* know, but I don't believe there was anyone else here but me who realized how near William A. Sailor was in point of time to making the world sit up and take notice. He was going over big very soon. State-wide big. Yes, in the industry, *nationally* big. I don't believe anybody could guess the limits—why, even I, who had worked it out with him—— Oh, dear!”

There was no throat-husking about it; it was said quite simply as Mrs. Wilde stood looking down at the closed desk that had been Mr. Sailor's.

Cora sat and looked at *her*, from the lizard-skin pumps and silken ankles to the shell-pink nudity of those ears. She couldn't even say a “Thank you,” and it made her furious. All she could think was, “What a nerve!”

Mrs. Wilde was speaking: “I'm gladder than I can say that Stevie's going to come in. He's got something his father had.”

It's curious in what tiny ways big questions are resolved. Cora got up and went out into the mill yard to meet the returning men.

“Stephen,” she said, “will you go by the Red Front and bring me home a dozen cooking eggs? I need them right off, so run.”

Through Heaven

Oscar was mystified. He looked, if he didn't say, "What's the idea?"

"Come walk with me a few steps, Oscar." Cora put her hand through his arm. When they had escaped the gates and got beyond the snarl of the planes, "Oscar," she said, "I know you're going to be put out with me, but I've decided. Oscar, I want my boy to have an education. And there are other things you'll say don't count, but they *do*; I know boys. Stephen is captain of his hockey team this coming winter, and treasurer of his class. And I—I want him to have an education. So there you are."

"Well, Cora, you're the doctor." Poor Oscar, his lower lip bulbed out sadly. "And that leaves just about O. T. Few to run this business for some long while."

"You're enough, Oscar. If you'd only give yourself *credit*!"

"It'll mean going back, I'm afraid. Pulling in our horns."

"What of it? Stephen and I don't want any more than we've had. You do as you see. But listen, Oscar, one thing!" She gripped his hand imperiously. "One thing, always, remember: you have my utterest confidence."

Few swallowed. Quaintly he was transfigured. He shook the hand up and down. "Don't you worry one bit more."

Cora went home and looked at her husband's photo-

graph on the cabinet. This wasn't William. It was only a minute's aspect of William as seen by everybody—— Tom, Dick, and Harry and that woman at the mill. She put it away.

This was the blackest day of her bereavement. It was as if, laying out the form of the beloved in fine cerecloths and spices for the crypt of memory, she saw the secret house burst into by strangers, come as by right, saying William was this, William was that, elbowing about him till they had elbowed Cora Sailor into the farthest corner, plucking at him with a terrifying confidence till among them they had carried what was left of William all away.

Here wasn't darkness; here was darkness thick with confusion, doubt of everything, and wizening jealousy. She dared not even pray for the "guiding hand"; not she, but others would have caught it, pulling it toward goals and destinies she had never been told of, "nationally big."

Stephen came in and sat on her bed that night. His bags were packed; "that was that." And one more thing had happened: somewhere in the shuffle of the day his constraint had gotten lost. For the first time he could talk.

"It's funny about father, Mother. Sometimes he used to cut loose, just like a kid. Remember the time—oh, I couldn't have been over nine—Bill was there—the time we all went up to Ferris Pond for the

Through Heaven

Fourth? Remember father that day? Firing the cannon? Sneaking off with us kids, swimming? And he could *swim*. Sparring with Mr. Colt? And remember when we were singing around the fire that evening, he gave you such a squeeze around the waist it gave you hiccoughs and we all had to get you water?"

Out of the mouths of babes. And after darkness, light.

The trouble was that she had been trying to pick up the memory of William by an end, the near end, where all the hands in the world would naturally be grabbing. Whereas the thing about *her* was that she didn't have to. She had it whole. She alone could take it by the only part that would take it up whole, the center of gravity, its mid-length of eleven years ago. She didn't know quite all it had done for her till morning. But the way she opened her eyes then to brightness where on other mornings murk had been, showed how the wonder had gone on to completion while she slept.

The first thing she did was to go down in robe and slippers and stand before the framed enlargement in the reception room, the one that something in her intuition had told her not to put away. The shades were still drawn, and the early sun against them filled the room with a diffused, soft glow.

The picture had been taken the very year of Stephen's reminiscence. (Did she remember that Fourth? *Didn't* she!) That suit had fitted him better

than any other he ever had, showing his shoulders. (He could *swim*.) His tie had something of pride in it, and his eyes something of humor; his hair, well trimmed, gave the really fine lines of his head a chance.

Here was the man. Not yet all accomplishment, not still all promise, but caught at the instant when these were balanced and life symmetrical; so only was it right to remember him. More than right; inevitable. By an act as swift as winking she had got her husband whole again, and forever and forever and beyond chance. And she was so happy of a sudden that she was bewildered with herself.

She wept when she bade her son good-by at the station, and people on the platform thought to themselves, "Poor lady!" so little could they guess.

This day was set apart from all the days of her life. It built itself like a triumphant poem—but a secret one. She went around with the guilty feeling of a carrier of stolen goods. Widowed but a fortnight, she was expected to look stricken, and if she burst in little pieces doing it, stricken she must go on looking for a while. One thing that helped was that tears were easy. Elia, seeing her mistress's eyes grow pearly, burst out sobbing and reddened her nose in sympathetic woe. How could she know that the reason for those tears was not that William Sailor was dead, but that he lived, and, living, swam with the kids and sparred with his neighbor and wore a brave tie?

Through Heaven

It was the same with the townspeople. They thought she was brave to come out among them again, and their hearts were wrung at sight of her pocket handkerchief. They couldn't guess that the reason she came abroad, and even did more marketing than was necessary, was that she had to flaunt the day like a banner in their unseeing eyes and, passing in silence, sing her song.

Oscar, calling that afternoon on business of the probate, found her in the back garden, which was full of the flame colors of the autumn bloom. Cora loved flowers, not only sensuously, but from the deep of her spirit, because out of the untidiness of dust and the dirt of mold and manure they were able to create themselves immaculate.

"But, Oscar, don't you think they're wonderful to-day?"

He might have saved his pains about the business. She would have none of it. As well ask a butterfly to stay in one place on a shiny day.

Always back to the flowers: "Don't you *love* an autumn garden? It's not so *fragrant* maybe as earlier, but it's so *clean*-smelling. You've kind of forgotten all the messy work of making it—the smelly part—and your dress and your nails." (At "nails" her mind skipped—the butterfly in a startled curvet to another bloom.) "So kind of come clear, Oscar, and rounded out. Look at them: thousands and thousands of

humble dabs of color, and all you see of them is the one big lovely mass. And all you smell of the millions of mixed-up little perfumes is the one big clean breath of—well—of life.”

Oscar had never heard Cora go on in this fashion. Obscurely embarrassed, he gave up his errand and shied toward generalities: “With Steve in school now, Cora, the way things are, there’s nothing to hinder you doing anything you like, is there? You could travel. Even go abroad, I suppose.”

Heavens! wasn’t she abroad enough for any one, in her own garden, to-day?

When Oscar left she walked around the house with him, her hand resting on his arm. The arm looked fat, but there was lots of muscle there.

“Now, don’t you forget what I told you yesterday, Oscar. Whatever you say or do about the mills, my confidence is with you.” Why shouldn’t it be? In a business way he was William Sailor carrying on. And he *looked* more like a *sailor* than William ever had. The effect of the fantastic pun was to bring pearly tears to her lids. More ill at ease than ever, Oscar observed that there was a wraith of color in the widow’s cheeks. A frown began to gather on his brow as he got out of the yard, and the frown was consternation. He halted.

“Cora is a *good-looking girl*! Now, what do you know about that?”

The clear autumnal dusk came on. Entering the

Through Heaven

house, Cora paused at the "den." She adored that brown little room. A rug had been moved over the place where the cuspidor used to stand, and instead of the coverless magazines on the table a few favorite books lay now: "Huckleberry Finn," "The Virginian," and "Reede's Commercial Practice." The last, on impulse, she returned to the bookcase before going into the hall to answer the telephone.

"Mrs. Sailor? Hold the wire, please. Pike Harbor calling."

She stood. When the voice came it was none she knew. "Mrs. William A. Sailor? This is Eric Fall of the *Plain Dealer*. Mrs. Sailor, are you prepared for a—a piece of news? Is anyone there with you?"

Singular; it was almost here she had stood on that other morning.

"Please go on," she said. From first to last then she neither moved nor made a sound other than the "Yes" required of her from time to time.

"It's about your husband, Mrs. Sailor. He's here. I mean alive. You there? I used to know him slightly, and I recognized him in a boarding house here to-day. Amnesia. Perfectly simple case. As soon as I told him who he was, and a few things, everything came back. They say he came here, having, as they judged, been canoeing and tipped over; he was quiet and minded his own business and no more attention was paid to him.

"Now, Mrs. Sailor, I want you to know that nothing has happened to your husband. He's feeling and looking splendid. We're leaving here at seven-one; that's in twenty minutes—arriving there at eight-nineteen. Sailor's fine; the only thing the local doctor here says is, it might be just as well to have everything at home—well—natural. Anything *not* to suggest he's been away. Understand? Till later, then; eight-nineteen. Good-by."

Cora hung up and walked through the dining room to the kitchen.

"Elia," she said. She sat down. "Elia, Mr. Sailor is not dead after all. I've just had a phone message he'll be home for supper at about eight-thirty. There are the broilers we were having to-morrow noon."

Now, this surely was dreaming, and weird dreaming, as if a thing that was victory could hobble the feet like nightmare. Feet that had to hurry.

The hour and a half was creeping. Cora went back to the kitchen.

"Elia, let's see. There are the broilers we were having to-morrow."

People. (Trust the small-town telephone operator, the news had flown.) People and more people gathering, but not seen. Simply there, outside in the night, waiting. All except Oscar; Oscar with the butter-dish eyes.

Through Heaven

"Oscar, what am I to do? Where am I to begin?"

"Take it easy, that's all; take it easy."

In the dining room there was the table, laid earlier, for one.

Oh, yes. From the china cupboard she brought plate, tumbler, saucer, cup, and left them on the side-board while she got a napkin. No, no, *two*. One she unfolded and spread at William's place, to save the tablecloth. Habit of years. He felt easier so, especially of late. Then she started to set the plate on it. But somehow the shiny round thing had twisted out of her hands. There it was on the floor, broken in ten pieces.

She went and brought another. It was weird what it did. Suddenly she called the maid in. "Elia," she cried, holding out the twisty thing, "set Mr. Sailor's place; I've so many things to do."

Brushing past Oscar in the hall, she hurried to the reception room. She didn't falter; she didn't look at anything; she fumbled in a drawer of the secretary, found a photograph, took it and set it up on the cabinet.

Next she went to the closet under the front stairs. "To have everything—natural." It was black in there. She bent to grope, and as quickly unbent, fingers flown to her throat. Her voice sounded high.

"Oscar, would you do something for me? Some things that go in the 'den,' in here—the ash stand and—things. Would you put them?"

As she ran upstairs Oscar called after her, "I'll go to the station. You take it easy; stay here."

"I'm going to the station."

She found herself in the bathroom. She closed the door. She bolted it. Kneeling down, she felt behind a stack of sheets in the linen cupboard and withdrew a pasteboard box that had somehow stayed hidden there all this while. Procrastination comes to strange ends.

Setting the box on the washbowl, she took out and put in their immemorial places, one by one, the objects. The tubes of toothpaste, one, two, three; "anti-pink." The round tin of breath tablets. The bottle of dandruff killer. The toothbrush. The corn razor. (A parenthesis from church slid across memory: "I believe in the resurrection of the body."). And three more bottles, oily to touch, animal, vegetable, mineral. And a black-rubber syringe with a red-rubber nozzle, for ear wax.

It took years. When it was finished she continued standing as she was, looking into the bottom of the empty box, from which there came up faintly to her nostrils a breath mingled of small medicinal smells. It seemed hot in the bathroom. Perhaps it was because the light, thrown back from all the white enamel, was too bright. Perspiration sprang from her skin and dampened her garments. Of a sudden she jumped, clapping her hands to her temples.

Through Heaven

"Cora!" The hail from the hall was repeated, "*Cora!* If you're going to the station, it's time."

They didn't talk driving to the station. People haven't words for miracles. Besides, Cora was busy in mortal fright trying to make a statement to herself. "I know why I've been happy to-day. It was a premonition."

At the station Cora was shown a fine consideration; she and Oscar had the platform to themselves. Neighbors and townsmen stayed back in the dark beyond the railway flower beds. There was more than curiosity; there was exaltation, a crowd sense of triumph over the grave. "Can you believe it?" "Can *she* believe it? My Heavens! her husband coming back alive!"

There was a star in the east. Cora watched it grow. When it was the size of a silver dollar it took on a rushing sound, like a wind coming. The wind came. The platform trembled for a moment and then was still.

The two stood. Presently, along the wall of shining windows, figures got down. When they began to come forward they were carrying something.

One ran in front, a clean-shaven man in a derby. "Mrs. Sailor? Is this Mrs. Sailor?" He jerked his attention to Oscar. "Are you with Mrs. Sailor? May I speak with you?"

But Cora's nails were in Oscar's sleeve. "No, tell *me*."

"My heavens! but this is too—this is too——"

"My husband is ——"

"He *seemed* all right, Mrs. Sailor. Even the doctor there was fooled. Sailor had been through too much, I guess. Outside Finnboro—without any kind of warning—the heart just simply—stopped."

Oscar heard her and felt her going in time to catch her under the arms.

"What, Cora?" He pulled her higher, her head on his shoulder, and bent an ear close to her lips. "What did you say?"

He never was to know. Neither, happily for the peace of her world, was she. Consciousness, aghast, had gone away before it could hear the whisper; it was the unconscious that put it:

"Are they—*sure*?"

A DRINK OF WATER

A DRINK OF WATER

SHE is a puzzle, in ways, to the gentlemen who are in need of blondes. One meditates: "How cleverly they do it: you'd never imagine her to be a day over thirty-five." And another, perhaps the very next: "How it does tell on them: she looks thirty-five already if she looks a day." So much for mystery; that she happens to *be* thirty-five never seems to occur to any of them.

Perhaps it is simply because she doesn't care. This is no fault of hers. It is possible that she would like to care, but has lost the way of it.

Occasionally gentlemen are troubled. There grows, at times, the resentful suspicion that she is not there, but somewhere else. But it is wrong of them to upbraid her. If she's not thinking quite altogether of present company, certainly she's not thinking of any other; and what more can gentlemen ask? It's wrong, too, to find anything wanting in the kindness of her smile. For if it's a slow smile, it's a conscientious and unfailing one—as unfailing as the greeting that goes with it, "And what can I do for *you*?"

And it's wrong again to look for irony or mockery in that. For that, simply, is what she means to say. She grows toward simplicity; from the complexity, say,

of a girl of fourteen, toward the simplicity of a girl of six. Perhaps some day the one vestige, the one thought-wrinkle graven between the straw-colored brows, will fill up and come out smooth. Then, perhaps, her simplicity will have become so transparent that no gentleman, no matter how elderly or needy or ashamed, will do her the ill of suspecting either weariness or raillery in her words.

Once upon a time one gentleman echoed them: "What can you do for me? You might tell me the story—if you'd like to, that is."

"What story? I'm not very good at stories."

"There's always a story, isn't there? How you—how it happened?"

"Oh, you mean how I fell?"

At twenty-eight, except for glimpses, Clare Mayo had never seen the ocean. In so big a gulp, then, it would have been strong medicine for anyone.

What Clare had written for was something "just big enough for one," where for her fortnight she could simply dream and do nothing, "not crowded," if possible "away out on some shore." The agent had promised her she wouldn't be pestered. The next cottage to hers, he wrote, was "well away."

It was. No more than a gray peak of its roof was visible, over the gray-grassed rise of a dune upshore, a good eighth of a mile away.

Through Heaven

"That's Mrs. Eccles. She won't bother you, though, land knows."

"But, Mr. Kinsman ——" Then Clare, the close-mouthed, closed her mouth. She turned again to survey the dimensions of the solitude she had bargained for. To Kinsman, the house agent, the symptoms were not altogether unfamiliar. So he made haste to recite his piece.

"For anybody wanting peace and quiet, this shore out here is the acme, the very acme, Miss. Nothing to bother or molest any Heaven's living thing. Folks don't know what their latches are for out here, nor their window shades. That's easy. Nobody's going to come all the way out to this end of the island that their business don't bring 'em. And what *is* there? Look all that side out front. The Atlantic Ocean, Miss. Course, if a body's timid of whales—huh-huh! Then where you're looking there, to the north'rd, out that point of land. Nobody. Not a Heaven's soul, except one coastguard station. And now round astern here, inshore: I'm sure of one thing, nobody's coming in on you across them swamps, and I'll tell you why, because all around that pretty-looking, sweetwater pond down there it's so chock-a-block full of quick-sands you couldn't put a doll down anywheres but it would go right straight through to China. It's all fenced in, you can see, but still I make a point of speaking of it to renters, even though there's signs up for them that run to read. But you stay your side of

that fence, and I don't know anywheres in all this Hollow Beach region, any time of day or night, a child of three couldn't feel as serene as in its own crib in its nursery. . . . Here's all the groceries, Miss—the vegetables—Enid James' boy brought them out this morning, as you wrote——”

They were in the house, somehow or other.

“Milk—yep, there it is. That blue-flame was new this season. Water in this tank. Fresh this morning. My man comes by to fill it mornings.”

Clare had passed out of the kitchen into the front half of the box, the bed-and-living-room. She sat down on the cot there and stared at the windows.

“Potatoes, yes, and eggs,” the agent's soothing voice wound after her. “And I make a point of mentioning to renters, in case they're not too able swimmers, they say certain tides there's apt to be a mite of an undertow along this beach—once in a great time when the wind's eastering——”

There were two windows facing Clare. The shades were two-thirds drawn. What was left was the blank blue of the sea. The emptiness she had wanted so long. But it moved. She saw it moving swiftly and directly at her. And now for the first time she became conscious of the sound it made. The rolling sound, too, came at her, loudening.

“But, Mr. Kinsman——” Her voice lifted and thinned. “*Mr. Kinsman!*”

She ran out into the kitchen. Through the open

Through Heaven

door she saw the agent's Ford in flight along the wheel ruts across the wavy moor.

It was after two, and Clare had had nothing since her roll-and-coffee on the Fall River boat. She fell to pawing over the comestibles, but her interest was stillborn. Presently she was out of doors. Child of the midlands and of cities, she felt herself shrinking. "I wanted to be alone—but heavens!" She went around front. "Well, I suppose I came to see the ocean, didn't I?"

From the shack there was an illusion of the water coming up, clear, deep and heavy, under the very foundations of the land, where it broke off there, fifty yards away. But when she had waded to it through knee-high wire grass, she saw that that was only a bank, and that beyond and beneath it a wide beach intervened to hold the sea at its distance, and even play with it, in fripperies of white lace and pale-green cornucopias. What was more, at a distance along the sandy ribbon there was a bevy of picnickers, their luncheon implements winking like semaphores, youngsters sprawled in bright bathing suits to soak up the September sunshine or hopping in and out of the shallow snowdrifts of the surf.

It worked magic. Clare thought, "How silly I have been!" A sudden softness ran in the wind, space shrank, and the light on the sand was gold. Now she remembered. She was on the holiday of years. She recollected the weeks of dreams, the romantic plans,

the adventurous purchases. At that, hurrying back to the house, she opened her bags and tumbled things out. She latched the door, drew the shades, undressed and, letting her clothes lie where they fell, she put on the new blue-and-white-striped boy's bathing suit.

Shivering with bareness and the tiny sword cuts of the grasses, she ran out again. There was a flight of wooden steps down the seven-foot bank, but she wouldn't take it; she spread her arms like wings and sailed. Picking herself up from her soft landing below, she ran on, light as nothing, down the wind-rippled slope toward the bubbles and the shine. She laughed at the feel of foam on her ankles, full of pebbles, like an electric rain.

Clare was afraid of a great many things, but water wasn't one of them. She had almost lived in the river in her girlhood summers, and she had swum in Lake Erie lots of times when the waves looked quite as high as these. But there was something more. In the revulsion from that opening moment of panic it seemed as though nothing in all space could harm her. She had never felt like that before. . . . Arrowing her hands over her bent head, she dived into the wall of the oncoming comber white as milk and smooth as glass.

So strong was that sense of liberation from cowardice, she was conscious of no dismay when the undertow took her. Wonder, yes; but wonder paralyzed too quickly to turn to terror as it swept her down.

Through Heaven

An oppression. A green darkness, greener, darker, veined with fluent lightnings. An incalculable violence, smooth as satin. Down and down. Life left far behind, no bigger than an orange, whole, round and brightly lit. Blackness in a vortex, whirling deeper, deeper. Then sudden radiance.

The face above hers, as she lay on the sand, was the face of an angel with a halo, a nose a little stubbed for humor, a tendency to freckles, and blue eyes that were dark with anxiety. A man's mouth, made for kisses to dream of, opened and said, "Thank God; waked up. Lucky I was headed this way, wasn't it? You ought to have had more sense." What a smile!

His eyes looked down into hers; hers looked up into his. They could never be strangers. They had skipped all that. Dreams do come true.

The thing was, Clare was as drunk as any lord that ever reeled. It was the first time she had ever been touched by an elemental violence; it was the first time she had ever died: and to find it hadn't hurt her was dazzling.

"I wish I'd known the sea long ago. *That's* what I've wanted *all along*."

"How do you feel?" asked the hero. "Swallowed much water?"

It was music. Celestial. Why speak? Why stir? "I wonder if he isn't—maybe—the Man. Wouldn't that be too wonderful!"

The Man Who Saw

"Tell me, can't you? Feel any better? Feel all right?"

Why stir? Why speak? "He loves me. He does. *Me!* He's not like them—all the awful others. It's because he can't help it: it's like the fearful pull of that undertow. My hair's all down my face and my lips feel blue, and he doesn't yet even *know* I'm beautiful. It's just because he's he and I'm me."

"You're frightened," he said. "Of course. But don't be any more."

Making a cup of a hand, gently he imprisoned one of her breasts.

She couldn't help it; it wasn't *her* recoil; it was the flinching of her nerves. It wasn't *her* gasp; it wasn't *her* hand that freed her breast and flung his hand away. It was—well, simply, she had been Clare Mayo too long.

He was on his feet, yards off, his face as red as hers, bewildered.

"Why—what'd you think?—I was just seeing if your heart——"

But then he laughed for bitterness. "My Gawd! can you beat that!" And wheeling, he walked away.

Words ran through her brain. "No! Listen! Please listen! Oh, you know I never meant—you didn't mean——"

But he was too far now, even if she could have uttered them, an affronted ramrod, stalking back to his

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picnic party where he belonged. She rolled over and put her hands around her eyes.

The sun through the hands made a chamber of warm rose, color of bliss. Into it tears fell. A stupid anguish. A tide of fury. "You fool!"

There was a joke there if one wanted to look at it. The weeks of anticipation. The opening panic. The liberation. The undertow. Death. Resurrection. The hero. All those steps of a dramatic preparation, like a story in a book. And then——

But, no! If nothing else would tell her, common sense would. Things as big as that aren't stopped by things as accidental and meaningless as that.

"He'll come back. He'll see. You watch if he doesn't. He'll be back."

She lay still, all ears. The surf rolled thunder up the sand, but that didn't matter: she would hear the crunch of his soles a hundred feet away.

"He'll come. You wait and see."

Once she started, as if she had really been sleeping, parted her fingers and peeped. The beach was bare. The picnic had packed up and gone.

"But that's nothing. What difference? He will—he *shall* come back."

The shadow of the moor bank slipped toward her across the reddening sand. She had a headache, and the chill had got into the hollows of her bones.

She didn't hear, after all; she simply knew. She

rolled over, sat bolt up, and took the hands from her eyes.

The man there shifted his eyes quickly, to the sea. He wore a baggy tweed patterned in "invisible" plaid and carried a picked-up stick in his hand. In the mid forties, sparely built, clean shaven, restless lipped, there was in his air a compound of absurdly warring elements—excitation and sang-froid—embarrassment and a kind of galvanic sprightliness.

But all Clare saw about him was that he was not the man.

She became conscious of the nakedness of her legs. When she had wrapped them in her arms, the arms too were bare. As the man's gaze pretended to discover her, with a slight start, she turned her own away. An old rancor gathered an old frown between her moody golden brows.

The man drifted nearer. He sat down. He sighed, as if he had sat down because he was leg-weary.

"Little bit chilly, isn't it?"

Clare felt cheated and sore and angry. She felt like giving this one, this time, a bawling out he wouldn't forget. But what was the use? Getting to her feet, with only a passing stare, she walked to the bank and climbed the steps.

At the house she dressed hurriedly, the pain in her head increasing. It occurred to her it might be because she hadn't eaten; and once more, conquering an aversion, she tackled the untidy heap of her provisions.

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She had a wick of the stove lighted and a kettle on to boil when, passing the open door, she saw the stranger with the stick outside. He made the most of her arrest.

"Nice little place you have here, Miss—uh—— My name is Smith."

It was in a way pathetic and in a way ridiculous, if Clare could but have seen it so. Under pretense of admiring the lines of the jerry-built shack, his gaze, full of the wistful excitement of the man towards fifty, continued to encompass her. He kept winking his eyes and gnawing his lip and hummed in his throat as if to cover the beating of his heart.

"Yes?" Clare's eyes, divided by the frown, passed deliberately over him. "What can I do for you?"

He seemed confused by the direct question, and took out his watch.

"If it's the old one about its having stopped—it's just six-twelve."

"Oh, no—no—it's not stopped. Good watch. Good timekeeper. Would you believe it, I've carried that watch——"

"I'm sorry, but I'm busy now."

"Only I thought—uh—could I have a drink of water, d'you suppose?"

Pinching her lips to keep from further words, she filled a dusty tumbler at the tank tap. When she got back to the door the man was nearly in.

"Just come, have you?" He peered. "All alone

here? I should think you would be a little—— Oh, thanks, yes. That's so sweet of you. Mmmm! this drink 'of water will save my life. . . . As I was saying——”

“You can leave the glass on the step when you're done. I'm sorry again, but I've got other things. Good-by.”

On his face, in the narrowing aperture of the door she closed, Clare saw a whole drama. She saw for the first time that under his easy daring he was almost sick with timidity, and under his sprightliness wretched with nerves and shame. She saw the eagerness of a screwed-up youthfulness collapse into the wistful chagrin of middle age.

He wouldn't believe it, even yet. He rapped. Then he pounded. His voice sounded thick. “Say! Why the huff? All I wanted—I hadn't finished thanking you for the drink of water. . . . Well, can you beat that!”

The door was already locked; Clare found the bolt above it and slid it loudly home. She stood leaning there against it for a while, again all ears. She was frightened, but oddly enough it wasn't of the man himself. It was of the thing that possessed him. She had seen it so many times, and she didn't yet know clearly what it was. It was the same with drunkenness: that too made the mildest of men dare to make asses of themselves.

It made her weary and it made her angry. It was

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precisely from that sort of thing that she had run away for her two short weeks—and here it was.

Where was he and what was he doing? She couldn't hear. The wind whispered too loudly over the shingles outside; the surf droned; the kettle had begun to sing.

She wouldn't say it till she was sure. But at last she was sure.

"Thank Heavens! I guess he's gone away."

Then her heart skipped. Feet were moving on the porch at the shanty's farther end. Knuckles on the front door.

Presently, a little out of patience, a woman's hail.

"Woo-hoo! Anybody home?"

Clare had some bread and butter and cocoa. The woman from next door insisted. Afterward, by starlight, they sat out on the step of the porch.

"So you're Mrs. Eccles," Clare mused. "Mr. Kinsman was telling me ——"

"Mrs. *Eccles!* Mrs. Eccles!" The caller leaned back and for drama held her sides while she chuckled. She was a woman somewhat older than Clare, but smaller and brunette, of the type that will stand a lot of refurbishing and fool them for years. "So Mr. Kinsman takes me for—but of course he would. I bet Tom Eccles would have a duck fit, though, if he heard him call me that."

Clare didn't quite follow. Nevertheless, she hastened to fill the pause.

"You're staying late, aren't you?"

"Yes, it is late. Tom was to come and get me two weeks ago; then a week ago. Now it won't be until ——" She sat brooding at the black ribbon of ocean, her arms around her knees. "*If* he's coming at *all*." Her voice grew harsh. "I wish to *God* they'd tell you. They might. It's not their getting through you mind so much; you expect it. It's the way they get out from under and leave you to find it out. Damn men!"

Clare simply sat. The other cast off that mood with a shrug.

"Well, we should worry. Now let's talk about you. Your name is ——?"

"Clare Mayo. Miss."

"Miss, eh? You must've had *your* work keeping single with *your* looks. Because I suppose you know you're exactly the type that knocks 'em dead."

Clare picked at a crack in the porch floor, pouting self-consciously.

"Well, I wouldn't say—though I guess I *was* fairly good-looking once, or at least they seemed to think so. The year the war finished I was—well, I was 'Miss Dayton' in the Beauty Contest conducted by the Cincinnati *Press*. And they gave me—well—the prize."

"My Heavenly Father! And you mean to say,

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after that, you could keep 'em off with a pole? Didn't you get millions of proposals?"

"Oh, dear, yes. It was too perfectly terrible."

"Too *what?*"

"It scared me so. It was too revolting."

"Oh, but there must have been *some* that didn't look so bad. No?"

"They were mostly all letters. I had twenty a day some days."

"How could *letters* scare you, for Heaven's sake?"

"Oh, I don't know—but the nerve of them! How could they know they'd love me, just from pictures in papers? What did they know about me? I mean *me*. It made—love—seem so—somehow—there was something so somehow insulting about it all. And the worst of it was, it made Avery ——"

"Ah!" The other grew sage. "I see. You were in love already."

"Not—not formally. But Avery and I—why, we'd been kids together. He was shy. He was a little lame, from an accident, and had some scars. But he was earning good money as a drug clerk, and in another year or so—but then when I was getting those letters, all of a sudden he gave up his job and went away."

"Oh, dear! And now what have you been doing with yourself?"

"I'm assistant manager of a Woolworth store in Newark just at present."

"And you've never been in love with anyone, since —Avery?"

"How can you be? When all they want to do is flirt and hold your hand and call you by your first name before they've known you ten minutes? *Love!*"

"But afterward?"

"There doesn't seem to be any 'afterward.' They never seem really carried away enough, heart and soul, to want to —— Oh, I don't know, but it seems to me, when they see I don't respond to their very first advances ——"

"But you are in love now."

"I? No, I'm not. Heavens and Earth! Me? Who with?"

"With yourself."

It was too startling and too absurd. But it paid her, for opening to a stranger the mouth she had kept shut so long, and to a dubious one at that.

"If you mean I've some self-respect, why, yes, I have. I presume my ideas about love may seem funny to you, and old-fashioned. But to me, it's too big a thing to fall into one minute and out of the next. Maybe I was taught wrong as a child, but here's what I do truly believe. I believe I was meant for some one man, somewhere, and some one man was meant for me. I do believe that when he sees me it won't be any mere 'Some baby! guess I'll give her a call' with him. I know that when our paths cross at last—when our eyes meet—I don't care where it is ——"

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The catch was in her throat, bitter with rue, before the memory was in her mind. A nose a little stubbed for humor, blue eyes dark with dilation looking down into her wide-open ones, a man's mouth, a boy's smile, and a halo against the blue. *Was he the man?* Or rather, was he *to have been?*

Clare surrendered to bitterness, and it cried in her voice. "I can't help the way I'm made. All I know is, the way I am, I won't be anything unless I can be everything, and that means forever. I never quite knew it until to-day, when I got into that undertow down there—but that's what I am—that's what I've got to be. I refuse to be a brook or a puddle to wade in. I've got to be the whole world's ocean to some one man. That's me."

The other nodded thoughtfully as she dreamed into the starlight.

"Yes, I know. We're all like that, we girls. We'd all like to be the ocean to some man if only it was left to us."

"Well, after all, why isn't it—in a way?"

"Because only some of us were born to it. God didn't pay as much attention to our wants as he might have; he was too busy with the men's. There are some men that need an ocean. But there are some, and there are plenty, that wouldn't know what to do with a whole ocean of water. All they want is just a cup of it here and there. Just somebody standing at the cross-road to hand them out a smile and a drink of water

on their way. Whoever the old writer was that wrote it might have put it, '*She* also serves ——' ”

Clare had turned to stare. As word by word it grew more incredible and at the same time more sibylline, her jaw hung heavier and her eyes grew big.

“We can’t help it,” mused the woman, dropping her feet from the step to the sand. “We can’t help our type.”

She got up with a flicker of laughter and a shrug. When she had said, “Good night, neighbor; sleep tight,” she walked away into the darkness, leaving behind her for a moment after she had vanished the whisper of her legs through the papery tangle of the grass.

Clare must have sat there for a long, long while. When she got up her muscles were aching. She didn’t know which way to turn. She had an impulse to sit down again where she had been. But she didn’t. She went to the north end of the shallow porch and stood staring out.

“What did that woman mean, we can’t help ——?”

It had been bad enough by daylight there, the sense of everything solid crumbling away into the swirl of uneasy waters and the solitudes of space. But now by starlight it was worse. When the earth had run a rod beyond the bright oblongs thrown from the windows, that was all. Then the black gulf began. Nothing any more to go by. Nothing to touch. Nothing even to see, unless it was a powder of fallen

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stars a little way down to the left, where the pond in the marsh made a mirror. And that was quicksand, all that way.

“Wh-what did she mean, we can’t help our ——?”

Clare ran away from it. Inside the house she set to work closing and bolting all the shutters. She slipped off her blouse, her skirt, and her shoes; then, overtaken by a curious exhaustion, drew a kimono over what was left, blew out the light, and crept under a blanket on the cot that did for a bed. But then the air grew bad. The shack hadn’t been rented; it smelled of a whole year’s vacancy. She felt more than stifled; she felt boxed up and nailed in. To save herself she had to unlock and open the door again. She pulled the cot over to it, where she could reach it with her hand.

“Oh, but I can never sleep this way, never.” She lay staring out into the emptiness. There was no wind. The sound of the surf had died to a ruffle. It was strange; the thing she felt now was not the solitude; it was the sense of a fearful publicity in face of it. “I can never! I can never!” She pulled the blanket up over her ear.

Clare awoke with a whiteness in her eyes.

The moon that had arisen was no more than a silver rind, belly down and tips in the air, but it gave out an extraordinary light. It made a road all the way in from the horizon to the porch; the blades of

the waves far out were no more shining than the blades of the grasses near at hand. Beneath its rays everything looked different, more cut-out, more rational. Clare had never been so wide awake, nor her mind so calmly, so pitilessly, clear.

"Why, of course! That's why everything has always been all wrong. *I am that type.*"

The devil in it was that, of a sudden, it explained everything. It made order out of disorder. Like one of those weird moon-rays cast back, it lighted all her memories from a new angle, never dreamed of. And the hated faces. Now she saw that it was she who had been the wrong one; it was they, with their quickening glances, the trailers and note-writers, the sailors and travelers, the young foxes in automobiles and the gray wolves walking alone, who had known what they were about.

A shiver passed from her ankles to her scalp, like slow lightning. She started to sob, but caught herself, and turned it into a raffish titter.

"Oh, very well!"

The life she had had seemed far away, but just now she couldn't mourn it; her mood was too glittering. A glittering mutiny. Glittering dismay. And little by little, deep somewhere, the glint of a thrill. She saw herself so tragic, so strange.

"So you thought you'd be the ocean. With *your type.*"

She recollected the fellow who had saved her from

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drowning, with a wince of mockery. "Not in yours, Dearie. He's the kind that does want the ocean, just now, anyway. It's the other sort, like that awful creature—*Oh, Lord!*"

All this while she had been lying as still as sleep, frozen by the moon. But now she started to an elbow and held her head erect.

"Oh, dear! where has he gone? The one I gave the drink of water, at the door. How do I know — Yes, and he asked me particularly if I was alone here. And he looked so—so — Oh, dear! how do I know he's gone at all?"

She saw the bitter joke. "Why, he's exactly the sort God was thinking about. Clare, dearie, *they're your kind.*" Lying back she stared out at the water.

"Oh, all right." She pinched her shoulders in a shrug, and again she tittered. "Let 'em come."

She was wide awake, yet it had the color and the inconsequence of a dream. There had been nothing in her eyes but the shine of the moon on the water, suave, fluent, a million threads interweaving. And when she had spoken, and though she hadn't even winked, the shape of a man stood against the glow.

He stood knee-deep in the grass out near the bank and, since he was so black in silhouette, there was no way of knowing which way he was facing, seaward or landward, until he moved. When he moved, it was toward the shack.

It was so quiet she could hear him, step by step,

shuffing the grass-stems. She saw him, without changing shape, grow large. She was conscious neither of fright nor of wonder, nor even of acquiescence, unless a log can be said to be acquiescent. She lay like a log.

If he had come right on, he could have come right on. Why he didn't was beyond her fathoming. Was it some sound she had made without knowing she made a sound? Magic again. There he had been, and there he no longer was.

But this time she knew what had happened. She could see the gap where he lay hidden under the silver carpet of the grass.

That frightened her at last. She swallowed, and the swallow started her heart going, and she could put out her hand. She pushed at the door. She slipped out of bed, and because both hands were shaking she used them both to keep the key quiet as she turned it and muffle the bolt as she edged it to.

No!

Her teeth chattered. She sank on the foot of the cot.

No! No! She was Clare Mayo, and no one could make her anyone else. And if she was in a fix now, it served her right.

That type? "Type! Type! Type!" *What* type, for goodness' sake? What a lot of babbling nonsense! From the mouth of a kept-woman too! And just because she was lonesome and blue, she had swallowed

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it whole, and pitied herself, yes, and almost been persuaded that she felt a kind of maudlin thrill.

She held her breath to listen, but she couldn't keep her heart still.

"No! No!" it pounded. "No! No! No!"

Why, it was all a dream; it must be; she ought to have known. The impulse to jump up and throw the door open wide was getting beyond her, when again she went cold.

Feet were on the porch. Near the door, which had certainly looked open but a moment ago, they paused, mystified. . . . The tread again. The weight of a hand on the shingles. He had gone to the window. Though the shutters were fast, the sash was raised, and Clare could hear his breathing. It sounded obstructed and heavy, yet rapid, whipped by nerves. There was the snap of a finger nail wedged under the shutter's flange, trying.

"Oh, God!" Clare prayed.

Sudden knuckles were on the door panel, inches from her ear. Rap-rap! Then, exasperated: Bang-bang-bang!

"Oh, God!" Clare prayed.

God answered. Scuffing, the feet passed off the planking of the porch.

Not a sound. Whether the sheathing was too thick to let her hear, or whether he had gone back to stealth, or whether, for a miracle, fooled by silence into believing the shuttered place was empty after all——

The Man Who Saw

"No, but he knows! He *knows* I'm here."

She started to run. She had to spread her fingers out ahead of her in the pitch dark for fear of colliding with things.

He won by yards. While she was still midway of the kitchen his hand was on *that* door. Had she locked it? She threw her body against it. Yes, she had.

"Go 'way! You old thing, you! Go on away!"

If hers wasn't like any human voice, neither was the one beyond the wood. It sounded weazened and penurious, whispery, stammery, appalled.

"Please! Let me t-t-tell you ——"

"No! No-sir! Go on away!"

"All I want —— Won't you o-o-open the door? A l-l-l-little mite?"

"I should say I would not! Not in a million years!"

"Don't be—be scared of me. All I want is ju-ju-just a ——"

"Oh, I know all that. '*A little drink of water, please?*' I know all that."

"Y-y-y-yes. Yes, yes!"

Clare nearly forgot she was terrified: it was she now who pounded the door.

"You listen; I'm not that type, I'm *not*, and don't you fool yourself I am. *Oh!* I hate you and all like you. I detest and despise you. I wouldn't give you a drink if you were dying in the Desert of Sahara. For God's sake, come to! Beat it! Go 'way!"

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Outside, not a sound. He must have been laid out. Utterly flattened.

It began to grow awful. Clare remembered what had happened when she shut the door in the man's face at dusk: the beginnings of red veins that were in his eyes.

"I'm not alone here," she called of a sudden. "And I've got a gun."

She couldn't hear what it was he said. But then it came. Fists in a tempest on the hollow wood. A shoulder, battering. A rain of heels. Her wits gone, legs propped stiff, Clare leaned with all her weight. The blows banged her shoulders and shivered down her spine. The latch cracked. A bit of it, as it flew, stung her wrist. She hadn't had time to pray.

Almost as suddenly as it had begun, it ended. As though appalled by its own racket in the hush of the moors, it dwindled to nearly nothing. Finger nails trailing down the wood. Then nothing at all.

Clare bent over. Near the crack, waist-high, she heard a puff of breath. It was queer; it gave her a queer turn.

"That's finished," she said to herself. "He's had enough."

No "perhaps" about it; simply, she could tell. And with that, with the passing of the need of fright, the strangest thing came over her. She couldn't help it; she thought to herself, "He was young once, handsome maybe; probably lots of girls were after him. Then

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they weren't after him so much. Shy, to begin with, he had to begin to try not to be so shy. By and by he had to begin even to be a bother. Now at last he's made this spectacle of himself, good and plenty. And that's that."

Weak tears dampened her eyes. Mixed with her pity there was a prick of guilt. "And there are some . . . all they want is just a cup of it. . . ." It was insidious: it took her off her guard. "*She* also serves . . ."

Clare spread her fingers out and walked into the other room.

"Bosh!" She struck the tears away with her wrist. "How many times do I have to show *that* stuff up, for Heaven's sake? I know as much about God as she does. I know more about me. I know what I want. I want my man."

She lay down on the cot. Everything went out of her. The darkness careened a little. Time stopped. It wasn't a swoon, yet it wasn't sleep.

Clare raised her face from the pillow and saw the cracks in the shutters white. She got up, reeling slightly, unlocked and threw open the door. The sun was still beneath the horizon, but up in the sky it was day. She was still giddy. All she knew was that she wanted to get away from there.

"I'll run over to *her* house."

Then she saw her neighbor, in a dressing gown, out

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at the steps to the beach, waving. When she had stepped out, careless of her stocking feet, she became aware of others, nearer, and grew confused, for they were men.

There were three. They approached, half bent, studying the sandy spots beneath the grass. One was in uniform. It was he discovered her.

"Anybody this way last night?"

"N-n-not that I know of." Why in the world did she lie?

"Nobody bother you?"

"I slept sound."

The man pursued the tracks. Around the porch. Around the corner.

"Guess you did."

Clare followed them, fascinated. When they had come to the back door and examined the ground there, the coast guard gave her a queer look.

"Guess you did sleep sound."

Even this failed to break the shell of her fascination.

They moved off, away from the shack, inshore, still parting the grasses. The coast guard came to a halt. He raised his eyes and stared ahead.

"Good Lord!" he said. "Of course!"

The second man whistled. "The pond! Of course he would. Not knowing."

The third man took his jaw in his fist. "Good—*night!*"

Clare ran away. When the woman known as "Mrs. Eccles" saw her coming she disappeared down the steps. Clare followed.

On the beach sat a boat, a weed-soiled dory with a broken stick through a thwart and a rag of sail. A second coast guard leaned on the gunwale, smoking a pipe. The sun, pushing above the ocean, turned everything pink.

The dory sat high where the tide had left it. Not dry, though. The surf-landing had half filled it with water. In this, as in a bath, a man reclined. He was making a horrible face at Clare.

"What is it?" she asked the coast guard. "What's the matter with him? Is he—is he—dead?"

"Sure is; this one. Wa'n't quite as tough's the other one, I guess."

"But how did he—how did it come here? The—this boat?"

"Oh, got parted from some fisherman out there somewheres, on the Georgias most likely. Then most likely blowed offshore a spell. Must've been adrift quite some little while, by the looks o' things."

"But what's he making that face—why is he—sticking out his tongue?"

"You never seen thirst?"

THE THINKER

THE THINKER

THIS has been a terrible winter for ice. Ice everywhere. What's a fisherman to do to make a living? Always this cursed ice.

Westering winds, ice on Truro shore. Southering winds, it crawls along and piles up on the flats at Beach Point. From the town, in the clear, cold weather, you can see it there across the bay, a gleaming ribbon, five miles long and a mile deep, waiting.

An east wind will do now. Any kind of a weather over the dunes from the ocean side is enough to push the creature adrift in the first tide, bring it snoring down and grinding down again, sweeping the moorings, raking the wharves, chock-a-block from the East End to the Cove. If you can't see it you can hear it; can't hear it, you can smell it.

These Cape Cod Portuguese fellows, these flounder dredgers and dory trawlers, they can smell it. So can their women. Can you figure a woman half awaking in the dead of night, turning her head on the pillow, trying to sleep again? No use. She sits up, paws for a match, blinks at the clock. Why? All the while she's sniffing, sniffing. Why? Of a sudden she shakes her husband by the shoulder.

"You, wake up, you! You hear me, Tony? Weather's went back to the east-rd. Git up! Git up!"

No time for coffee. Swig of gin, perhaps. Pants, shirt, boots, rustle and thump and yawn in the sour lamplight. Damn the ice!

There are lights, all spontaneous, in half the kitchens in Portugee town. In one house it's: "Git out, Frankie!" in another: "Wake up, boys!" There's a fog in the lanes, and under it you'll hear men coming down, rattling their oilers, spitting in disgust. Damn ice! You'll hear dories grating on the frozen beach and the plaint of tholepins. Then you'll see lanterns out at the moorings, shrouded will-o'-the-wisps; you'll hear a clank of chains, a slap of cables, and presently, from everywhere, far and near, above the siren moan of Wood End, the put-put-put of engines. All for the beach; all for the railways, the lee of a dock, jetty, bulkhead; all in a hurry and devil take the hindmost. Bump!

Bump and another bump! What's that astern? Block of ice. The advance guard, swift cruising. Hark! Railroad Wharf down there; hear the piles groan. The devil's here, so quick.

Rotten, raw, mud-colored dawn. The storekeepers are up, the plumbers and teamsters, the butchers, the bakers, the candlestick makers, all at their breakfasts, lucky men. These fishing fellows don't go home to their breakfasts; they squat along the ridge of the beach like misanthropic crows and study the ice. The

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whole harbor chock-a-block to the Point. No knowing when the wind will haul now; no telling when the stuff will clear. A week maybe; maybe two weeks. Here it is mid-March; time everybody was getting away South for the spring herring. What's a fisherman to do for a living? Let's all buy farms a thousand miles from salt. What a winter! Some folks say there was a year a hundred years ago when there was no summer at all.

Ice, ice, ice, ice, ice!

Two years ago Dummy Santos married a wife. Five years ago he left high school and went shares with another fellow in a power-ketch, dredging inshore winters and going South for the netting every spring. He used his head, kept his mouth shut (that's why he's called Dummy), and saved his money. Three years ago he bought a house in Saltdock Street, because the people had to sell, and two years ago he married Rosie Farquiera.

The fellows with whom Rosie used to run were amazed. Rosie Farquiera! and that shrimp! Rosie liked to dance and go for auto rides; she wore her hair short and knew how to use her eyes and never wanted the word for a spade. An "animal," the minister called her; a "heller," Father Deutra called her, publicly, at mass. So when in his sober, long-nosed, tight-mouthed way Dummy Santos hired a closed car one day and took Rosie to Father Deutra's altar, everybody in Portugee town was mystified.

The Man Who Saw

Till lately they've continued to be mystified. It's seemed as though Dummy were the right kind of a husband for that girl after all. Though he never says anything, you can see he's proud of her, and he dresses her well. On her part Rosie has fooled them all by making him a good wife. She was all right, anyway; the whole trouble with Rosie was that she "never give a hang what nobody thought." That's bad in a small town.

She has fooled them all, till lately. Till within a month. It was too good to last. This can be said for Rosie, though: that fellow from the guano-factory has turned more than one woman insane.

Rosie's beaux used to call Dummy a shrimp. He's not a shrimp, but he is a small-built man. He'd never get anywhere with his stature if he didn't keep his eyes open and his mouth shut and his head working. One thing about him is that he's a coward at heart. Offshore in any kind of a breeze he would shake in his boots to see the combers coming up like hills if he looked at them; in a real gale, even in a lee, the howl of the wind through the rigging, or in a winter fog the growl of hidden ice cakes, would put him in a panic if he once harkened. He's often seasick, too, and he doesn't know how to swim.

Why then does he go to sea for a living? That's a question. Why, when he could make a go of a store or a teaming business ashore, with his money and his head, does he want to put up with that kind of a

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life, having to keep his eyes glued on his engine and let Frank do the steering when the waves run high, stuffing cotton waste in his ears when the rigging sings, and turning himself wrong side out over the gunwale almost every trip he makes? That's the question. If you know the answer you know more than I do, or anyone else in Portugee town.

"Seems like he does it to spite himself. He'll go any weather."

"You theenk he go South these year?"

"Go *South*? Will a duck swim? You watch; he won't say nothing, but he'll get away South while the rest of 'em's still dreamin', if he has to cut a channel clean to hell'n' gone; you watch the little shrimp."

"You theenk he *weel* go, though? I wouldn't eef I'm heem, these year."

"Her, you mean? And Stinky Lorry?"

"I'd stay to home these year eef I'm heem; that's all I say."

"*He* won't. A woman's one thing, and fish is another."

"He take a good deal stock in her, all the same."

"Yes, but if every man in this town was to stay ashore to watch his woman ——"

"Well, why don't he take a poke at these fella?"

"Look at their sizes."

"Well, why don't he take a gaff? Why don't he take a gun?"

"Ain't got the spunk. All the spunk Dummy's got

is into his head. If it was something he could do by settin' down and thinkin', now."

"Thinkeen! Thinkeen!"

"Yes, you can't pity a man like that, even if he is undersized."

He looks undersized indeed to-night, swinging his tiny ax against the great ice in the moonlit frame. One side of the frame is the Bay State Freezer dock; the opposite side, just as long and spider-legged and black, is Railroad Wharf. One end is the beach, an arclight showing through from the front street, the big yellow globe over the side exit of the movies, and down lower on the beach the lantern-lit ports in the cuddy of the power-ketch, chocked up on its rollers, where Frank has just been in to see for the last time, at Dummy's behest, that nothing is forgotten. Groceries all right, gasoline all right, oil, grease, gear, twine, kindling, coal, water, gloves, socks, oilers, plug tobacco, castor oil, new flare-wicks, old magazines—everything tallied and right for the South. The other end of the frame is black water beyond the wharf ends.

From that black open water to the ketch imprisoned on the beach it is roundly a hundred yards. The ice is rotten, but it is thick. The breeze still holds as gentle as a zephyr in the West, but the old easterly signals still burn on the pole on Town Hill.

It's a race. There are folks sitting on the docks to watch it. The harbor pack went out at sundown on

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this flaw of westerling breeze, leaving only the ice that's stuck between the wharves, like mud in a rake. But it hasn't gone far. In this breathing space of clarity and moonlight you can see it hanging around, of two minds, outside Long Point, a glimmering streak without visible end. No, it hasn't gone far, and on Town Hill Sam Works won't pull his easterly signals down.

"She'll be back before morning," says he. "We ain't shed of that ice yet, not by a dang sight. I'll give you fellows six hours at most before the wind backs up again."

Six hours. Give them four hours. Just four hours before the devil closes the channel around Long Point and comes piling in once more. No, the way the ten-foot cut is creeping beachward under the strokes of the three axes, give them but three good hours now. Three hours only, barring accident, and Dummy and Frank will be on their way to the fat fishing while the rest of the fleet is still dreaming ice-bound on the beach.

"Listen, though," says Frank, holding his ax. "There's somebody else got wise up to the west'rd. Hear 'em choppin'. Daisy Avellar's gang, I wouldn't wonder. They got a gang, though, aint they?" Frank's mother was Irish; he has blue eyes, and though he isn't much heavier than Dummy he's a man who likes to fight. He looks at the lane of black water behind them, clogged with gray débris of ice, then at the distant gleam of the floe, then at the three little yellow

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eyes in the waiting cuddy ahead, then at his partner, hunched over his work, tight-lipped, thinking, thinking. Then he glances at the broad, magnificent shoulders of Stinky Lorry, the volunteer, burying his ax head with enormous, grunting, rhythmical blows in the punk on the further edge of the channel. Then he spits on his hands and says: "We should worry, though."

"You should worry," says Stinky, "if you didn't have me to help you guys." Without missing a stroke Stinky glances across at the two with a curl of his handsome, beef-red lips.

It's true. Stinky, working alone on one side, crashing through with his iron and, from time to time, with his great boot, shoving the manageable cakes down and out of the way beneath the floe, keeps easy pace with the two fishermen working on the other.

He loves this. He loves to whirl his arms and sweat. There are many things to think of while he does it, simple things, apt to his simple mind. There's an elementary symbolism about this crashing through to the beached boat; had Stinky ever heard the tale of *Beauty* locked asleep in the wood of thorns he would be bound to think of that. Kisses at the end.

Then there are lots of eyes on the wharves watching him, seeing how easily he holds those two runts even, understanding with wise grins how he is making a fool of Rosie's shrimp of a husband every blow of his ax. They know what's up; they know, they know.

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Stinky loves to be watched and admired. No man in town is so much admired. Percy White, the select-man, may think he is important, but who turns to watch him when he passes, as they do when Stinky goes down the street? Steve Small, the Bay State engineer, may imagine he is good-looking, that he dresses up to the notch and has a lot to do with even respectable women, but in truth he's no match for Stinky Lorry.

Stinky smells. He works in the guano factory, where they turn spoiled fish into oil and fertilizer. The stench in that place is beyond belief, something so abominable that it cloyes, an attar of putrefaction, a sediment in the air. You get used to it for yourself if you work there, but no matter how much you wash when you get home the smell stays on you for others. You can put perfumery all over your clothes; it makes no difference.

What's the odds? Stinky has made the discovery that a great many women actually like it. Some women it seems to draw. He has seen women he was hugging, close their eyes, part their lips, dilate their nostrils, and seem to drink.

He doesn't understand it himself, but there must be something strange and strong and nice to them in that smell, after the plain grease and gurry of their husbands. Like a caveman, perhaps, in the movies.

Thinking of the movies—when the movies are out there'll be more eyes on the docks to watch him swing-

ing his ax like a toy in the epic moonlight and to wink with the knowledge of how, seeming so generous with his help, he is making a fool of that wise guy, that sawed-off smart Aleck, Rosie's husband, every yard nearer they get to the imprisoned boat.

Stroke by showering stroke. Yard by slippery yard.

No, but thinking of the movies, he must remember. When the movies are out there's something else he must do. He promised her.

So he thinks his large, smooth, fortunate thoughts.

"Look at him," says Elmer Sparks, sitting on a salt box in the lee of the shed on the Bay State. "He's got a gall."

"He sure has," says Brother Sam with a chuckle, "the big windbag. I was to Silva's store when Dummy and Frank come in this afternoon to buy a couple axes. 'Goin' to make a stab at it?' says Silva. Dummy says nothin'. 'Never no tellin' what *we*'ll do,' says Frank. Stinky's followed 'em in. 'If you're aimin' to make a break to get South,' says he to Dummy, 'I ain't got nothin' to do; I'll give you a hand.' What a nerve! Dummy says nothin' and stares at the floor, red's a beet. 'Stinky,' says Frank, 'I got half a mind to bust you one with this ax I got,' says he. Dummy's still starin' at the floor. 'Silva,' says he, 'give us another ax then, if Stinky's so kind to help.' (Elmer spits over the side of the dock.) And they call that a man, that'll take and eat dirt. Look at the shrimp."

In the downpour of the moon, girt by the empty

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water, the dirty ice, the gaunt, black wharves, the silhouette of the town sprawled against its own lights, the come and go of beacons, the pearly ribbon of fog making up so soon beyond High Land in the east—in this spaciousness of the night Dummy is less than a shrimp: he's an inchworm.

He looks like an inchworm when he humps his back and brings his ax down. He chops with all his might, too, but he doesn't love it. He thinks, too, but his thoughts are neither smooth nor fortunate.

If I was a man, he thinks, I'd bust him one with this ax I got.

People imagine that Dummy Santos can think more easily than most; they have somehow got the idea that his head works like a machine, taking in problems at one end and turning out answers at the other. No person would spend so much of his time thinking if it were at all hard for him. This is not true. Since he was a baby everything has been hard going for Dummy—marbles, hopscotch, reading, thinking—work, all of them.

It's not that there aren't thoughts enough. There are too many.

I've got to hurry. That ice is coming back too quick for us, chock-a-block. Bang with the ax! Harder! Bang! Faster!

Why, though? Name of goodness, what am I doing? Not faster—*slower!* *Slower*, you numb fool! You crazy! To go off South and leave Rosie alone!

Rosie's not herself. Not since that fellow came around—swaggering around Saltdock Street—the hound! The woman-hound! Slower, you fool, you! No, better than that, take some ammonia, same as they do in the storages, and go back and freeze it up, every foot, every last fathom of the cut; seal and congeal it up again, tight, tighter'n a drum!

Bang, though! Faster! There's Town Hall clock: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. Faster, you weak fool! Crash! Splinter! Sweat and swing! Want to make a living? Sweat blood then! Bang!

I have to chop between my feet, he thinks; that's the only way to get leverage. One foot's on the ice that goes. When it goes my other boot slips. The black water sucks up in a spout. It scares me. If I went in and sideways and plunged down under the ice and came up with my head against it—bumping, suffocating—drowning like a caged rat in the blind cold! Every time that ice goes from under I slip. What if one of these times——

Why do I have to be so scared? That I won't make a living? Won't get ahead? Ahead of everybody else?

Why do I have to be scared of everything? Of leaving Rosie? My beautiful Rosie? I trust Rosie.

I do not. Not for a second I don't trust her; not with that big, strong, lusty, red-mouthed, fat-bosomed Stinky Lorry, that woman-grabber there. If I was a

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man now—half a man now—I'd—I'd—but then they'd all grab me. They'd hand me over to the sheriff. Send me to the electric chair up in Charlestown. I'm scared of that.

Look at him there. The big windbag! The big bull!

I wish I was like him. I wish I *was* him. I wish I was heavy in place of light, reckless in place of careful, admired and large-mannered in place of two-minded and mean. Why couldn't I have been born him? Then I shouldn't be going off South with a worry ——

Am I, though? No, I ain't. I ain't going! I won't! I won't!

Look, though! The wind's gone slack. She's making up in the east already. Sam Work was right. Hurry! Bang! Faster! Bang!

"Think we'll make it, Frank?"

Frank weighs his ax and wipes a sleeve across his face. He estimates all the factors, as a man might read the figures of a problem on a blackboard—the measureless blackboard of the March night.

"We come fast," he says, glancing back along the cluttered canal. "Though the breeze has rotted out and that means a shift pretty quick. Daisy's gang has quit; he's give up. I don't know, though. Give us some luck, though. We ain't got a great ways to go now. We'll make it, I guess."

"You'd make it in a pig's eye, though," says Stinky

from beyond, "if twa'n't for me helpin' you." His ax flashes bi-colored between the arc and the moon; a chunk of ice gives under his foot; he strikes it with his heel and sends it plunging and splashing, and laughs, exhibiting his teeth. He sinks the iron in the line ahead. "In a pig's eye you would."

Frank studies him, hawks in his throat, spits on his hands. He raises his ax and lowers it again and studies Dummy. His eyes are narrow with the impatience of a manly soul.

"You goin' to see your woman again before you go, Dummy? Or have you?"

Dummy broods at the ice. "I don't know. Maybe if she comes down. She's to the movies."

Once more Frank flings up his ax, and once more arrests it. He can't fathom a man like Dummy, and it's too much for him to hold.

"Say, look-a-here! Are you goin' South on *my* account? Tell me."

Dummy says nothing. He broods at the water.

"But, say, look-a-here, for Heaven's sake, fellah!" Frank corners an eye at Stinky and drops his voice. "For Heaven's sake, fellah, what you aimin' to do about it? What you goin' to do?"

Dummy says nothing. He reddens, eats the insides of his lips, stares at the water. The black, black water, clogged with livid, livid chunks.

What am I going to do? His thoughts echo. What am I going to do?

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The cold black water! The secret water running back under the floe, floored seven feet deep with tin cans and bottles and roofed over with ice, through which a man, if he were trapped down there, might see the dim blue phantom of the moonlight shining—while with his face against it he held his breath—till his eyes burst and his lips caved in! What am I going to do? What, what, what am I going to do?

“What are you going to do?” Frank persists in his ugly whisper.

“Take it easy, you guys,” Stinky calls across. “Why don’t you set down and have a smoke and leave me do it all? I don’t cost you a cent, and I like it.” Slice goes his ax. Crash! Grunt and swing and crash!

The movies are out. Under the yellow globe, between the side exit and the bakery, there is a jostle of men, women, and children. Some of the men, even a few of the women, being of a fishing race, observing on the moonlit stage beneath them this drama as full of animation, suspense, and sardonic comedy as any film, trail out on the Bay State to mingle and exchange questions with those already there.

“How was the pi’tures?”

“Not too bad; least I liked it. Didn’t you, Hen? Had me fooled, the way it turned out in the end—that Mexican. But, say, how these fellows comin’, out here? They goin’ to make it, you think?”

“If Stinky’s got the say of it they will, all right, all

right. Look at him work, will you? Look at him sweat? Neighborly, eh?"

"Huh-huh-huh!"

"Huh-huh-huh is right. Ho-ho-ho! Did you ever see the gall?"

"He's a magnificent creature," says the doctor's wife, a lady from away, to the new district nurse, also from away, both munching peanut brittle.

"Say, what's this now? Stinky quittin' on 'em?"

Stinky Lorry, having left his ax stuck deep in the ice, is striding deliberately toward the Bay State. Frank and Dummy leave off chopping, mystified. After a moment Frank calls: "Where you goin'?"

Stinky keeps on.

"Stinky, where you bound for?"

Stinky wheels and wags his head vigorously, making a sign over his lips for discretion. He cups a hand: "Can't you see there's ladies, you fools?"

A titter runs along the height of the dock and is suppressed. Stinky pursues his course into the shadow among the piles beneath the wharf. He picks his way through the leafless forest, lengthwise of it, beachward, and, come to the rising, steps out on the further side. Here there's a nook formed by the flank of the freezer, the rear of a grocery, and a twine shed.

"You here?" he demands at large.

Rosie comes toward him, edging down along the lee of the concrete foundation of the freezer, a clandestine shade, an obscure, long plaid sports coat, a nervous tur-

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ban, plums and checkerberries, and a dim, pale face with lips that look black in the gloom.

"Was the pi'tures good, girlie?" Stinky lets an arm fall about her shoulders. "Enjoy yourself?"

Her shoulders crowd up against his arm with a greedy pressure.

"They goin' to get off, Albert? They goin' to make it? Tell me quick!"

Her words fall over each other; her dilated eyes search his. It is at moments like this that you will see Stinky Lorry at his best.

"Gentle, dearie! Keep your shirt on. You ain't told me yet was the pi'tures good."

"You devil, you imagine I *seen* the pi'tures? You devil, you! Tell me, Al! Oh, Al! For Heaven's sake, don't keep me waitin'. They goin' to make it? *Is* he goin' to get away?" Sliding one hand around his neck, under the collar of his mackinaw, she pinches the tendons together at the back with a sudden cruelty. "He *ain't*! I can tell. That's why you don't say nothin'. Now that shrimp's goin' to be hangin' round to home for another ——"

Stinky yawns a grin. "You wouldn't mind that. You got along quite a spell with Dummy hangin' round the ——"

"Not since I seen you, you devil, you; you great big, overgrown, good-lookin' kid, you. I ain't the same's I was. I never love a man before. I ain't—I can't—don't—can't you *see*?"

"Say! Dog! You ain't anxious or nuthin', are you? Well, then, what if I was to tell you, no doubt of it, he'll get away all right to-night—inside an hour maybe? Hey, there! Dog! Well, all right, leave go me and I'll give you one kiss. You like that?"

Sometimes in his mind, which is like a Greek god's in its seamless simplicity, Stinky has moments of sober wonder how he ever came to be given this power of turning women insane. It's just that some men are born that way.

There goes Town Hall: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

Beyond Truro shore, beyond the great curving sand-wall, the moonlit fog is no longer a ribbon, but a battlement with towers. Unhanded by the west wind, the towers topple inward on the dunes; High Land Light vanishes; the siren begins to moan. The easterly rallies its forces, under cover, on the ocean.

In the bay, outside the wide jaws of the harbor, the white wanderer is ill at ease. Now it swims north on the gradual slide of the tide. Now it hesitates, touched by a ripple of irresponsible air, a mouse of a breeze at play while the cats of the east and the west are away. Now it whimpers and sighs through all its five or six square miles of nervous fabric; it complains with a million crystal clinks, a million tiny watery collisions. Rifts open like black wounds and heal again.

It has gone none to the east, none to the west; it is still of two minds, like the sky. In one quarter of the

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sky mount the silver pinnacles of the fog; in another the clear silver pinnacles of northern lights stream high, stream low.

Sam Works has come down from Town Till. Standing by the chocked-up ketch, he says: "You boys've done well. You got a good hour clear yet before that ice is apt to close the Point." Sam knows weather.

Stinky leans on his ax haft and wipes his face. He looks back admiringly over the finished channel.

"Thanks to me," he says.

"Do I leave her run?" Frank asks. Dummy nods. Frank swings at the master chock, one, two, three heavy blows. The wedge goes flying.

"She starts, she moves," intones the doctor's wife to the new nurse, over on the wharf, "she seems to feel ——"

The high-sided, forty-two-foot hull descends with a slipshod lurch, ungracefully, gouging sand and wallowing down amongst the floating chunks. The water fountains out on either side and drains back again, leaving two large scallops of shine on the floe. That's done.

There's Dummy staring at it. He looks like a dummy for certain. His eyes are big; his mouth is little, pinched, and dry.

What am I going to do?

He sees Frank jump, catch the gunwale, and with a monkey-wriggle get aboard.

What *am* I going to do?

The time has come to think. No, the time to think was a month ago. At the very last it was hours ago, before that boat came there.

How did that boat come there, stocked for the South, riding in that crack in the blue-white floor? How did that crack come there, straight as a ruler from the wharf ends? Well, this is how it came there. All the distance from the wharf ends it ate its own way with a ravenous, irresistible speed, pushing before it across the treacherous ice Dummy and Stinky and Frank—herding them willy-nilly—giving them no time to think—driving them like helpless blind ones, stride by stride, chop by chop, before its blind, worming, greedy snout.

Dummy feels like an actor come to the first night without yet once looking at his lines. In the cold air, from his bloodless face, sweat oozes. He stands there like a stick and opens his mouth.

“Hand me out them boat hooks from under the rail, Frank.”

His mouth falls open again. “You take one of these boat hooks, Stinky, and while Frank limbers the engine you and me’ll go clean out some of them extra chunks, further end.”

“That’s right,” Stinky agrees with contented malice. “My labor don’t cost you nothin’, does it, Dummy?”

Dummy looks at his boots, his face going red. “Not a cent,” says he.

So they go, leaving the shore, the boat, and the peo-

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ple behind them, walking one on either bank, their boat hooks over their shoulders like the pikes of medieval men-at-arms. Not unmurderous arms, either, these implements, shod at the ends of their ten-foot stocks with twin iron barbs, one coming, one going. So they march, the little man and the big one.

In place of a hundred yards it's a hundred miles. Plod, plod, plod.

Yet it's not far enough to give a man time to think.

The irony of it. Dummy Santos, the thinker! The fellow notorious for being so handy with his brain! Plod, plod. The brain is as dead as the feet.

The whole thing is that your brain works hardest unbeknownst: you'll never realize that you've been thinking a thing out till the business is done and the answer jumps at you. The fearful answer, sometimes.

That water. Look at it, inky black and numb cold. Look at the ice floating in it and the ice-lips along the sides, to let the moon through but no breath. Look, you fool!

Oh, Rosie! If I was a man! If I was half a man! If I had anything against the pitiless world except my head!

Rosie would be all right if this fellow would leave her be. This big windbag. Rosie's not herself, that's all. Dear, beautiful, good Rosie!

Look back at the shore, though, so far; look up at the wharves, so high; look down again at the water in

this madcap cut, inky black between the cakes and paralyzing cold.

"Here's one should go," says Dummy, halting abreast of a cake the size of a dining table. "Here's one should go," he repeats, staring down at the floater, his face as pale as the dead, his tongue moistening his lip. "Here's one should—should—g-go."

"Well," says Stinky, fetched up at picturesque ease on the further rim, "it's on your side, ain't it?" His voice is full of gusty sarcasm. "You want I should swim over?"

Dummy takes his hook and jabs at the cake. There is something comically fumbling about the way he goes at it. He picks at the thing; the pole seems too heavy for him; a man could do more damage with a table fork.

"What's ailin' you, Dummy?" Stinky puts his head to one side, as a cock might study the wavings of some newfangled green-blue grub. "That's no way. Put your heft on to it. Heave one corner down in under the ice and give it a shove in back. That's the eye."

Dummy gingers his toes nearer to the brink, heaves his pole perpendicular, and jabs down at a corner of the water-logged cake. He puts his weight on it. He makes a big effort, sucking in breath to swell his cheeks.

Bungling. Inept and luckless. The rotten corner gives way. His boots claw at the ice, but rubber boots aren't claws. His fingers grab at air, but fingers

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aren't wings. Wharves swoop; the moon whirls up the sky. The water comes up in a black fountain, washes the lip of the floe where he stood but now, subsides, leaving a scallop of shine, and all the little ice fragments bob and clink.

It is amazing how much can happen in twenty seconds.

The wharves screech, the shore yells.

"Was it Stinky?"

"Naw, that's Stinky there; ain't you got no eyes?"

"He can't swim, Dummy can't!"

"Can't swim!"

"I think he hit his head, goin' down!"

"He's gone! Gone!"

"Jump you! Git out o' my way, then; leave me jump off this dock!"

"There goes Frank runnin'!"

Frank yells as he runs. "Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!"

The doctor's wife sits down and clamps her hands to her cheeks.

"Stinky!" everybody's screeching. "What the ——"

"Stinky! Stinky! For Heaven's sake!"

Jump from the wharves; go on! Leap from the shore! Run! Sprint!

Frank's voice sounds falsetto: "Stinky! Stinky!"

Call it twenty seconds. Twenty minutes it seems to Stinky Lorry. He feels as big and hollow as a house,

left suddenly all alone out there in the cruel, brilliant, public moonlight on the ice.

He can't think. But, then, Stinky never could think. He's hypnotized. The gulf at his feet is full of too many moons: every little floating ice splinter has a moon in it, and all weaving different ways on the water rings, pirouetting, colliding, so many fire threads. He's hypnotized. A bubble appears over at the other edge with a moon of its own in its crystal chamber. Two ice slivers pounce upon it and it's gone.

Just as Dummy is gone.

Where's Dummy gone?

Stinky gives a gasp. Squatting down on his hams, he grabs his boat hook in both hands near the end and begins to probe the deep water. With powerful wild sweeps, knocking the débris about in dissolving arabesques of foam, he lunges. He sweeps east, sweeps west, wringing his wrist tendons, stirring in submarine circles. Stirring. Stirring. Sweating big cold beads and stirring.

Now the soul of Stinky rebels. Indignation, self-pity, overwhelms him. To have to squat here, stirring.

Why did fortune have to play its darling a trick like this? Why did worthless Dummy have to choose this public instant for his silly, awkward doom? It's an outrage.

To have to squat here on his hams in the spotlight of the moon, in the eye of the town, his name whistling

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on a hundred lips—squat here like an old woman, stirring, stirring!

“Stinky!” “Stinky!” “Stinky!”

Like an old woman stirring mush!

What a note!

“Lorry!” Their voices louden in his ears. They’ll never forget this.

Thud, thud, thud! Their footfalls make the ice shiver, nearer, nearer. They’ll never forget this, never. Like an old woman stirring mush!

Hold, though! Wait a second! Glory be! The boat hook catches. The hidden barbs grasp something. Away over there. At farthest arm’s length. Over there under the lip of the further side. Twist it, man! Haul! Haul!

Swish! Sag! The devil! It’s come loose, the hook!

Grab again, man! Reach further, man; grapple and grab! Look out for your balance, though, or in you’ll go yourself. Into that icy, inky water.

Stinky is scared. A sudden terror dams his wind-pipe. Water is so awful with the moon on it. Grab! Prod about! Poke and prod!

“Stinky, for Lord sake!” They’ll never forget the sight of him, squatting here and poking like an old woman with a broom straw trying a cake.

Stinky is scared to death. Twenty seconds are gone. That awful water! Once more the water makes a fountain and Stinky’s gone beneath it.

Oh, he's scared, no doubt of that. When they haul him out, with his fist clamped in Dummy's hair, you can see his eyes turned up, all whites, from the terror that's under the ice.

They sprawl on the floe, he and Dummy, dragged back from the brink.

"Stand back!" cries some one.

"Stinky!" cries another. "Look up! Get your bear-in's. Take a swig of this, old man!"

The gin burns down into his stomach, burns up into his brain.

All over. I've done it. I pulled it off. And I'm all safe, all right!

Stinky's on his feet, at his height, streaming puddles, tossing the wet mane off his brow with a fling of his great glistening head. He looks down at the sodden sprawl of Dummy. Frank's going to pick him up; so is Sam Works; without a word Stinky brushes them both aside and heaves the little fellow up in his big sopping arms and sets off striding shoreward.

That's a picture for you.

"I bet they give him a metal."

"Give him the Carn'gy metal, I bet."

"Dummy drowneded, you think?"

At the rise of the beach Sam Works takes a hand. He used to be captain at the coast guard.

"Roll him over a barrel. Roll the water out of him."

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They pry him out of Stinky's arms and roll him over a barrel from the freezer. Stinky stands there in a shiver.

"Another swig, Stinky! All you want this time, boy!"

"There's no water into him," Sam announces. "Must've held his breath good. Heart's beatin'. Scared fainted, that's all. Get him home."

Stinky pushes them away. He saved the lad; he'll carry him.

Out in the street, under the drug-store light, the doctor's wife insists on holding him up and wagging one of his burdened hands, saying: "That was a truly valiant act, Mr. Lorry. Thank you." The new nurse with her gives him a nod and a serious smile, looking straight into his eyes. "To-night I have seen a hero."

She's not a bad-looker, this new nurse. Not bad, not bad. Dog!

Stinky thought he knew all the women and girls in town, but there are lots out to-night, some in wrappers or raincoats with their ankles showing, that he never saw before. And some that would never look at him look at him now, marching through the crisscross lights, with startled, admiring eyes. Who said there weren't fish in the sea? And that new nurse! Dog!

Tramp, tramp, tramp. A multitude of feet. A multitude of murmurs.

"They'll give him a metal."

"Dove right in—never mind the ice!"

The Man Who Saw

"I never had the hunch 'twas in him. If it come to a pinch ——"

Stinky himself, down in the dark bottom of his heart, used to have the same shadowy hunch. If it came to a pinch—— What a miracle? What a comfort! What a relief! How grand not to have to claim you're a hero—seeing you *are*! What a rush of warm strength! Dummy's weight is nothing. Poor shrimp!

"Stinky carries him same's a baby."

"Sure. But, say! Say, did I see Dummy's eye open then?"

"You did not. How could you when he's scared fainted, the poor shrimp?"

"Lot o' good thinkin' done him that time, in under the ice!"

"If it wasn't for Stinky Lorry ——"

Tramp, tramp, tramp to the westward; turn up Salt-dock; tramp, tramp.

"There's his woman in the door."

"There's Rosie. Somebody must've told her. Say, though, listen; huh-huh! 'Tain't much like what him and her expected ——"

"Hush up, you dirty-mouth fool! As if this was any time ——"

Stinky marches through the gate and up the steps. He and his lippy freight fill the lamplit doorway. Rosie retreats before them, her fists to her cheeks, look-

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ing faint. Frank trails in. Sam Works guards the gate.

March into the kitchen, smelling of oil-cloth, blue flame, and onion fat. March into the bedroom, smelling of slops and sleep. Lay him down on the bed. No, though; lay him on the floor till you get his wet things off.

"I'm going to faint," cries Rosie from the kitchen. "I feel so queer."

"Dang the woman! Here, Frank, you get his clo'es off him. Look-a-here, Rosie, don't faint."

"Close the door," says Dummy in a whisper when Stinky is gone.

Frank almost falls over backward from his knees. He doubts his ears.

"Close the door, Frank." Dummy has an eye open, an eye that has looked into hell. If a man figures to make a living and keep a home in this world, though, he's got to look into some queer places. "Shut the door," he says, for the third time.

When Frank has obeyed and come back to haul at his boots, Dummy says in the same low tone: "Leave me be. You run down and get the engine limbered."

"Well, I'll be!" says Frank. Finally he steps out to the kitchen, where Stinky is propping Rosie up and looking queer.

"He'll come around all right," says Frank. He says the same to Sam and the people outside. "Might's well all go home."

Dummy lies there, toes up, eyes wide. He shakes and shivers. It seems as if he can never get up. He listens. It's the clock ticking. Tick, tick, tick, tick, counting off the precious seconds, the fatal minutes; ticking the wind up, ticking the ice in, ticking the Point shut, ticking the South away. Still he listens toward the kitchen door.

"Oh, Al! Oh, Al!"

"*You* ain't faint. Shucks! Tell yourself you ain't faint, that's all. Now stand up, will you?"

"Oh, Al! Ain't this hell! Oh, Al, look at me."

"Why for? Say, Rosie, now look-a-here, you don't seem to ——"

"Oh, Al!"

"You don't realize. You come awful near not havin' no husband to-night. If I didn't get him that second—if I didn't dive in under the ice that second, I never'd've been able to save your husband's life. Same's I did."

"Oh, Al!"

"I never think much about it at the time, but now it seems like folks are carryin' on, like I was some sort of a big hero ——"

"Al-Albert! What's come over you? Al!"

"Yes, but—but—here's a chair; you best set down."

"Oh, Al!"

The bedroom door opens, and there's her husband in his drowned clothes.

"What's happened?" he asks in a thick, weak voice,

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staring at Stinky. "How'd I come here? I was in under the ice, drownin'. Who got me?"

Stinky hangs his head, and his face suffuses. That's something new under the sun.

"Your clo'es is wet, Stinky. Twa'n't *you* got me!"

"'Twas too him," says Rosie.

Stinky pouts his lips. "'Twa'n't nothin,'" he grumbles.

"Nothin', eh? Nothin'? I *guess* not." Dummy gazes at the simple fellow with a look of awe. "Guess they won't think it's nothin' when they get round to givin' you one of these metals for heroes. Nothin', eh?"

"Huh!" Stinky wrings out a coat sleeve on the oil-cloth. "I'd look great in a metal, I would. Won't catch me wearin' no metal around."

"Well," says Dummy, "I got to thank you for my life, that's all, and so has Rosie. From now on anything I got in the world is yourn for the askin', that's all. I got to beat it now, or I won't get South. Good-by, Rosie, old girl. Good-by——"

"Good-by, Rosie," Stinky chimes in, edging toward the door.

"You ought to get dry," Rosie cries at him, half wail, half rage.

"Yeh, you ought to get dry," says Dummy, looking back agreeably from halfway out of the door.

Stinky bites his lip and grins uneasily, edging out all the while.

"Guess we ain't neither of us so wet now as we was, in under the ice there, eh, Dummy? Well, Rosie, good-by."

Side by side they tramp down Saltdock, their boots going squash, squash, squash, with the water in them.

"I got to get a move on," says Dummy. "What if that ice has shut in, after all," says he, and he begins to run.

"I'm froze," says Stinky, running too. Squash, squash, they get along, Dummy at his knotty calculations, Stinky at his large, smooth, fortunate ones.

"Stinky," says Dummy, cornering an eye up at the big trotter, "if you wouldn't mind, while I'm gone South, droppin' round now and then to see that Rosie's all safe, all right. Though her and me owe you so much already ——"

"A man worries too much," says Stinky, swallowing his Adam's apple, his eyes rapt ahead. "Dummy, you don't happen to know where this new visitin' nurse is puttin' up, do you?"

"Never seen her," says Dummy. "Portugee woman?"

"Portugee? Guess *not!* Guess you *ain't* seen this girl! *Dog!*"

Well, that's over. That's done. There goes Town Hall: one, two, three . . . eleven. Eleven! And you can smell the weather making in from the east.

Dummy is sitting on the cuddy roof, a big coat over his shoulders, elbow on knee, chin on fist, as the ketch

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comes clear of the last scattering cakes beyond the Point and swings her head to the south.

"What you thinkin' of?" asks Frank from the wheel.

Thinking! Thinking! How Dummy hates and despises thinking! If he could only get along in the world some other way, with some splendor, some heroism, some grace!

"I'm tryin' to think would we be more apt to run on to 'em off Jersey," he says, with a line up his forehead, "or down off the Virginia capes."

FE-FI-FO-FUM

SHARON lay in her bed in her room above the sea as she had been lying for weeks, so white and so still that if life and its bother had already withdrawn from her, one would scarcely have seen the difference.

A mosquito settled on the forearm that lay candle-colored on the counterpane. Watching it from the bottoms of her eyes in detached perspective, she thought: "Poor dear, for all the blood you'll find for your supper *there* you'll starve, I'm afraid."

She might have seen an analogy between the insect's plight and her own, but she didn't. She was too brilliant, too rashly generous, and too beautiful ever to perceive precisely this one thing: that because she was what she was, and never knowing it, the veins of them she loved were robbed till they could be robbed no longer, and their bones were ground to make her bread. It was a mercy she didn't realize it; she *would* have died.

Forgetting the mosquito while it still was there, squatting above her wrist, her thoughts drifted into channels of melancholy, half acquiescent, half mutinous. In a woman less than Sharon it might have been self-commiseration. "I should never have plunged; I should have saved out something for a new stake in

life. You'd think, remembering Ralph, I'd have learned."

She became aware that her arm was on fire. The mockery and the pity of it came over her. She who had been Sharon could no longer defend herself.

"David!" she called. "David! Please!"

David came up the stairs, three at a time, alarmed.

"Yes, dear? What?"

"See! There on my arm! Kill it, won't you? That's the lad!"

After he had obeyed he stuck his hands in his pockets and stood around. Sharon had to look at him. That was almost the worst of the trick her headlong innocence had played upon her (now for the second time). Three years ago he had been young and raw, wearing his Broadway clothes with the wiseness of the song tinker, the hard-working hired man of jazz. Perhaps no one on earth but Sharon herself would have descried under the guilt of the David Vio of those days the gold of the promise of creative genius her faith in him sought and found.

Now he wore quieter apparel and with a finer negligence. But the promise, that had seemed to develop so swiftly at first under the guidance of a love that must have been the largess of a princess of fairy to the Scotch-Italian kid, was dead. The guilt, after all, was guilt. The flash Sharon had seen was only (again) a flash in the pan. And there he stood, his hands heavy in his pockets, wondering what more he could do in

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this house the woman had given him, to ease her while she died.

"When did the doctor say he was coming, Dave? Five-thirty again?"

"Yes, dear."

"Hand me that end book from the desk. The blue one, please."

"No, but look here, you oughtn't. He told you to lay off that medical stuff; you know he did. If you want something to read, now, I'll go ——"

Sharon sighed.

"Please, please. I'm sorry, but I don't feel up to squabbling. The last one to the left; that's right. You're really and truly sweet to me, Dave. Thank you; that's all."

Between the book ends on Sharon's desk seven years ago there had been nothing but verse. Three years ago it had been music, its essays, critiques, and periodicals. Now, within the month past, like courtesan turned eleventh-hour nun, all the vivid forces of Sharon's interest seemed to have centered themselves upon what is, after all, the one great human drama, decay and death.

Dreaming sometimes, too weak for anything but dreaming, she regretted the years she had squandered in what had come to seem esthetic philanderings; she regretted she had ever known any beauty save the beauty of fact, or any men but men of science. Protest as young Jamie Butler would (he came from the

neighboring town to attend her, always a little bewildered), the sick-room library grew of fatter and dunner treatises with the postman's every stop. To-day's new one was Pilker's "Physiology of the Blood."

Holding it propped against her bent knees, while her lover's footfalls were still on the stairs, she had forgotten him in contemplation of the life-mites streaming and counterstreaming through the arteries of herself. Stirred as never by any sonnet or any pattern or cadence of created art, in her imagination she saw the on-march of anemia magnified and dramatized; she followed the paling armies of the defenders, driven in rout through the city of life, a myriad epic, a tragedy magnificent and melancholy that made her hold her breath.

So Jamie Butler found her, and swore in mumbles over his bag.

"I shall have to retire from the case if my orders aren't minded, Mrs. Vio!"

It always gave her a funny start of mirth when he addressed her in solemn innocence by David's name. More than once she had been near crying: "Silly! *he's* not my husband. My husband's name is Cole!" She would have loved to see the blue eyes pop and the generous mouth, resolute with shyness, fall ajar in his freckled face. She never had done it, quite; with a thrift she had saved it up.

Jamie towered in the room. His gestures were angular. "I don't want you dying on me, Mrs. Vio, and

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that's what you're trying to do, doping yourself up with morbid suggestions like this, day after day."

"But if I'm amused?"

Jamie blushed. Sometimes, as now, he felt himself perfectly bedeviled. Here he was, the well one, erect and strong; there she was, supine and waxen-weak; yet now and then he couldn't help feeling he was somehow the overmatched and helpless of the two. Sometimes she had him within a breath of crying, hands out: "You see right through me, don't you? You know I don't know half what I'm up to. You've found me out for a bluff."

He must fight that. He frowned as he busied himself in rummaging for his hemoglobin chart. "All I repeat is, I'll have to give you up."

"You mean—you *have* given me up? Is that, at last, the truth?"

Jamie's face was on fire. He straightened and agitated his fists. "*No!* Good Lord! That's about as far from the truth as—as—anything."

He could have hanged himself for a bungler. Rattled, he had committed the cardinal crime: he had frightened a patient who had cause for fright.

Sharon's eyes had left him. Her head fallen away on the pillow, she stared out of the window into the darkening blue. Where she had been quiet she was intensely quiet now.

"I'd thought I knew it all along. Yet I hadn't, really. I suppose it's because I've been playing with

the idea, like some one else's story, and so keeping it not really so. It's a queer turn it gives you, isn't it, to know you're going to die?"

Jamie couldn't think what to do or say. He had heard of being drowned out by noise; he hadn't known that silence could do it quite as well. The wash of surf among the rocks beneath the windows, the whine of passing terns—it was silence all the same. Sharon began to speak again:

"Yet there's something amusing even in this. I wouldn't have believed it—it will sound funny to you—Heaven knows it does to me—but of a sudden there's something I'd like. I—I'd like to see my husband."

"Why!" It wasn't question; it wasn't protest; it was embarrassment.

"Why? Because women are curious creatures, Jamie. (I'm going to call you Jamie the rest of the while.) Especially when they're growing old. And when you're dying you're old, you know, even at thirty-seven. Perhaps it's just that the heart grows timid as time grows little and space grows big. I don't know. An hour ago I'd have smiled. But now—well—I wish my husband were here."

Jamie went out on tiptoe and downstairs. "Here he is," he said presently, bringing David in by an elbow, mystified.

Sharon's gaze left the window-sky and came to the

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pair. Tristful as it all was, she had to smile at the humor of the chance.

"It seems, Dave, I'm pretty hopelessly done for. If I ask something of you will you understand, and will you try to forgive me?"

"My dear, of course."

"It has nothing to do with us, Dave. It changes nothing past. But I want to see Ralph. I wish you'd wire my husband please to come."

It was Jamie that made the sound. "Oh-h-h!" It wasn't much, but it was enough. He flamed, and, closing the mouth that had fallen open, he swallowed. "Oh-h-h! I—I see."

Sharon went on: "You'll find Ralph's address in the red book in the drawer there, Dave. And, Dave, you'd better wire him money for the fare."

David went down and did as he was bidden, telephoning his message to the nearest telegraph office with even a certain care about the words. If Jamie was dazed, so too, was he. Not until he had fallen to roaming about the music room, big and shadowy now with the first of dusk, did he begin to feel. The two things he felt were mutually contradictory.

He felt at the same moment bitterness and gratitude.

Sharon needn't have told him in plain words he wasn't enough. For more than two years, imprisoned here (*damn it, imprisoned here!*) on the bread of love's servitude and the water of ideals not native in him, it

hadn't needed words; he'd *known* he wasn't enough. Day by day, month by month, the sense of his failure to measure up, to ripen any further the promise of that strange, striding, nectar-drunk half year at the beginning, made him meager and mean in his own eyes. Denied the musical appetites and outlets of mediocrity, little by little idleness and shame of idleness had driven him to the bottles he kept hidden like a squirrel's hoards around the place, only to find them end in a dopier idleness and a shabbier shame. Shame, at least (he sometimes thought in wild, mutinous moments), that ought to have been enough for her.

He took a nip now, two nips or three, from a flask sequestered in the music cabinet. It was all right this time; no one could blame him; he'd had a shock and it had left him wobbly. And, besides, there was the taste of gall in his soul.

The whisky made him a better man. The gratitude that had lain in wait while virulence had its hour came to the top. After all, who was he to complain? His failure was his own. Heaven knew that Sharon had done a hundred times as much for him as anyone had ever done for anyone. She had given him leisure to work, and solitude and beauty to work in. No other place could have been fitter for the building of genius than this, isolate from the little beggings and pilferings of the crowd in the spacious seclusion of sunshine and winds and stars, and verily founded upon and

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beaten through forever by the simple, the living and breathing mother rhythm of them all, the ocean's surf.

And Sharon had done more than give; she had sacrificed. She had sacrificed her home with her husband; she had taken herself out of her world of clever and adoring people, and for love of David and for faith in him she had condemned herself to the exile of the gradually forgotten. Nor was she for half measures: once her heart's purposes were clear, all the force of her mind and the amazing vitality of her spirit were delivered over, without stint.

The alcove in the music room with the day bed in it told the story of her passionate identification with David's work. He was never left to dream alone. With a book, or with shirts or socks of his (upon which she seemed to delight in plying an inept needle), she would lie all afternoon while he was at it, holding his creative urge at full steam, as it were, by the ceaseless pressure of her still applause, or breaking in at times (when some phrase of his "Symphony in Miniature," given tentatively to the keys, moved her too deeply) with a "That's for me! Oh, beautiful! Come and kiss me, lover, quickly, and tell me it's Sharon's, it's mine!"

It still lay unfinished, that "Symphony in Miniature," on top of dusty things in the cabinet, and helped to hide the flask of rye. That was all it had done since the day when, playing it for Sharon, he had seemed to

hear it himself for the first time, and leaped up from the bench, sick at his stomach with dismay and shame.

"What the devil! *That's not mine!*"

Ah, Sharon! The depth of her goodness! The ardor, almost the fierceness, of her championing! How then she enwrapped and defended him in her warm arms, called him a silly, and demanded in heavenly indignation whose it was, pray, if it wasn't his—and hers!

He didn't say. But it was the bastard of a dozen secret violations; he knew its progenitors now in every volume on the teakwood shelves beyond the piano there. A bastard begot in ignominy, without even the excuse of lust.

If only he could have "ragged it" then! If only he could have gone back to the instrument while he was still so sick and twisted the pompous theme into comedy with his syncopating fingers and "kidded it to death"! But Sharon believed in him too deeply; he couldn't make himself a clown.

Dr. Jamie, coming downstairs now with his bag, heard him and turned into the music room. It was night; they stood peering and awkward, like shades of competitive ghosts met by chance in a house that might presently want haunting.

Jamie said finally: "I'm glad that Mr.—Mr.—uh —Mrs. ——"

"Cole."

"——that Mrs. Cole's husband is coming."

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Truth rushed to David's lips. "So am I!"

"Because if it comes to the point of blood transfusions, there should be some one to take the responsibility."

"Yes, that's right."

"Well, good night, sir. No, no, don't come."

But David insisted on going to the door with him. It wasn't politeness at all: it was his sudden dread of being left alone. He fiddled with the knob. "You've got to run, I suppose?"

"Always got to run. One of our doctors has just died, one's sick in bed. I'm the other. I'll be up all night, like as not."

"What's there in it when you come right down to it, Doc?"

"A living."

"You're young. Why don't you specialize? Experiment around? Discover something, like these boys at the institute, and get yours and sleep nights?"

"Fat chance!"

Jamie pulled his hat down and went off toward his tin car, fitting his strides to the uneven intervals of the stepping stones. David didn't see him. In an imagination ill at its ease he saw Ralph Cole traversing the same path in the opposite direction—as early as to-morrow perhaps.

It was a curious fact: David had never seen Cole but once, and then at a distance. With an accretion of self-contempt he found himself remembering Cole

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as a big man with a beard, at least ten years older than himself.

"I should worry, though."

He went up to Sharon's room. She lay in the small light of candles dreaming at the ceiling. He had to speak to let her know he was there.

"I've sent the telegram, sweetheart; so that's done."

She dreamed at him instead of at the ceiling.

"Telegram? Oh, yes, I remember—yes."

"And, Sharon, I do understand. And there's nothing to forgive, so don't go worrying yourself about that."

"Oh, yes. You're sweet, Dave. Yes."

Ralph Cole had shaved off his beard. It thinned his face and cut his stature down tremendously. In one way he looked now as he had looked when Sharon first knew him in his Park Row days, a hard-working, hard-boiled quipster, turning out his column of gossip and light rime six days of the week and gambling the seventh on some vaudeville skit or libretto that was to make his fortune and fame. In another way he didn't look the same man at all. It wasn't that his tie had been knotted too many times or that his shoes had cracks in them; it was in his eyes.

This was the fellow who, as Sharon's bridegroom seven years ago, had seemed, to the amazement of every one, to be about to magic a silken purse of poesy,

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a song of the times, rich in fantasy, and yet nakedly real, out of the sow's ear of his novitiate in doggerel.

It's hard, when you've been so near to doing the big stuff you can't do, to get back to doing the little stuff you can. And when you've thrown over the comradeship of happy-go-lucky roustabouts for the friendship of the elect, it's hard to get back with any pride into the comradeship again. The worst part of his three neglected years had been their loneliness.

David wondered why he had thought he was going to be afraid of Cole.

There had been after all just one moment of that: the moment when, his legs like stilts at the servant's announcement, he had gone out to find Cole and his suit case in the hall. For a wink or so then there was the sort of thing one expects in the first confrontation of husband and lover after the fact of infidelity. Bows, formal and guarded. A prefatory silence, full of the possibility of almost anything—curses, maledictions, pistols, tears. And then, having looked David over from hands to eyes, Cole grunted in a funny way and struck a palm between the younger fellow's shoulder blades, saying in a tone at once sardonic and whimsical: "Well, David Vio, here we are. And where do we go from here?"

They went into the music room and sat.

"What's wrong with Sharon?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure the doctor knows. She just seems to fail."

"Again?"

"What do you mean—again? I didn't know Sharon ——"

"Nothing. I'm fond of her, and I'm sorry I'm a pig. Now, what can I do? I'll do anything. She knows I've come?"

"I was just going to run up."

David ran up. He returned, soft-footed.

"She's asleep. We'd better wait."

As they settled back to it each one wondered if the other one heard him sigh. After all there was lots of time; they were a little glad of the reprieve. David especially needed it; he wasn't yet quite clear of the confusion of his own relief. Rather, it was still growing. Cole didn't hate him, but it wasn't that. Cole seemed actually almost to like him, and yet it wasn't even that. It was the feeling that came to him, as abrupt as it was obscure and as obscure as it was powerful, of an equality.

It was getting toward evening, a windy dusk. Cole studied the spacious proportions of the room that gathered its shadows about them, and when he spoke there was a curious urchin quality of tone, reverence and irreverence in one.

"Gosh, what a grand place to work!"

"It *is* a grand place to work—that is, it *would* be a grand place ——"

"M-m-m-m. Yes. Yes. I know."

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It went deeper than equality. It was consanguinity; brotherhood.

By and by the lamp was lighted in the hall for Jamie, who passed through it, hat and case in hand, toward the stairs. Cole, in the music-room gloom, reared a quiet head.

"Who is *that* man?"

"That's her doctor."

"Oh-h-h!"

"Why?"

"So-o-o-o!" Cole got up and went to stand at a seaward window, his hands behind his back. "I—I begin to see." His brow was all queer wrinkles; wrinkles that ran down his nose of a sudden into a grin. "Honestly, I'm relieved about Sharon. I'll confess, from that wire of yours, I was scared."

"I don't seem to understand ——"

"You will when you wake up. When you realize that Sharon *is* the most extraordinary woman in the world. I'm still awfully fond of her. Did you know that? Yes, and so will you be; you watch and see. You'll forgive her and go on loving her, too. That's because she's utterly, absolutely, innocent. It's just that God moves—through her—in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform. I'll bet a dollar she truly believes she's dying. I'll bet ten dollars she hasn't an idea why she had you send for me. And yet I'll bet a *hundred*—well—let's wait and see."

It was still all mystery to David. Ill at ease and

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anxious to be doing something unmysterious, he said: "Well, we'll *have* to, I guess, now the doctor's here. And while we're waiting, what would you say to a small bracer? I happen to have some pretty good rye—pre-war."

Cole smiled as he saw him getting it from its hiding in the cabinet.

"I used to keep mine behind the 'Dictionary of Synonyms.' "

In the room above, Jamie was busy with his instruments. He took them out of the case and then put them back again. He was tired. For the first time in his life he had the parlous feeling that were he to ask his nerves for something extra it might not be given him. He had been awake a good deal the night before, but not on calls.

Yesterday's revelation, from Sharon's own lips, that it wasn't her husband at all she was living with, had startled and troubled him more than he would have believed it could. Part of the mischief was that it gave shapes to things that had bothered him heretofore precisely because they hadn't shapes or names. He had always felt uncomfortable in Vio's presence—had rather disliked him, in fact—and this needed no further explanation now. As for Sharon, till to-day but a curiously strange stranger who baffled his skill to cure at the same moment that she wrung his heart with her faith in his silly gesturings, he saw her of a sudden in

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the devastating light of the truth, romantic and tragic, scandalous, doomed, and incredibly beautiful. He hadn't known any woman of that kind.

"You look tired, Jamie. Are you working too hard?"

He went to the bed, sat down, and took her wrist to try the pulse. He stared resolutely at the rug. "A little hard. We're short-handed. Never mind."

"I do mind. I wish you hadn't to do it. There are so many in the world just big enough for a country practice. Men like *you* ought to be ——"

It caught him off guard. He peeked around, mistrusting raillery.

"Oh, but you see I *know*, Jamie. I've watched you a long while."

There was a change in her to-day. It was as if, accepting her destiny, she had passed already in spirit through the fact of death and arrived at peace. Her smile, luminous with a kind of mischief (he kept trying to remember she was scandalous), gave him the queerest vertigo of the soul.

"The first time I saw you, Jamie, you had on a shockingly green tie."

"Wh-where? When was *that*?"

"Months ago. In the drug store in town."

"Before you were—before you were taken ill?"

"Oh, yes. Months ago, in the early spring."

"Well, I'll *be*! How—how'd you know—it was I?"

"Asked the druggist. I suspected you for a doc-

tor. I'm abominably interested in doctor-things, you see."

Jamie glowered, as much as to say: "Little you know!" With a tiny strength she freed her wrist and gripped his hand.

"No, it's not in the workaday humdrum you're thinking of I'm interested, Jamie; not in the babies and the stomachaches of the stay-at-homes. But in the adventure of the frontiers of it all—the twilight zones where biology and chemistry and physics meet—in the men that are pioneering—the men that gamble with the devil in their secret laboratories, to lose their souls or learn one little thing. Jamie, those are the true figures of to-day. And when I see you, with your youth, your eagerness, your head ——"

"My head?"

He jumped up, crimson, laughing like a fool. "*My head!* That's a good one! There's not enough there to wad a shotgun with, and if you don't know it you ought to. I bungle everything I do. I've bungled *you*. I've tried to pretend I knew what I was up against—and—and look at you now!"

Sharon held out a pleading hand, palm up. "Never mind, never mind."

"*Don't* I mind! Anyway, though, thank God I've had enough sense at last to call somebody in that does know. I was going to tell you—Dr. Bromberg—F. R. Bromberg of New York—he's coming to-night on the seven-ten."

Through Heaven

"Jamie—what's Dr. Bromberg going to say?"

"If I knew—well, I'll tell you: I hope he's going to say that with a simple transfusion or two—with the loan of a little new blood in your arteries ——"

"Jamie—*whose* blood?"

"Oh, why, that's all right." (Why was she looking at him that way?) "I've arranged with a fellow to come out in the car with Bromberg. Why, but—but look here—he's a healthy boy, basket-ball player, strong as a bull. Why, but—but, Mrs.—Mrs. ——"

He couldn't expostulate any further. The repugnance, irrational as it was, the recoil of the whole fastidious woman was too pitifully real. "But tell me," he protested, "what can we do?"

"I'd rather we'd do nothing."

"But, Mrs. ——"

"My name isn't Mrs. Anybody. It's Sharon!"

"Well, then" (he couldn't do it), "there's Mr. Vio, of course. He'd certainly be only more than willing ——"

"Jamie—I'd rather die. Will you believe me, I wouldn't have David Vio ——"

"Now, *why*? It wouldn't hurt him, if that's it. Good Heavens, a couple of days afterward you wouldn't know he'd been touched. Then *why*?"

The single candle that had been lighted at dusk had grown too little for the invading night. He could no longer follow the play of the subtler thoughts in Sharon's eyes. He saw her part her lips impulsively; then

nothing came of it. It was as if, having been stripped of all other defenses, she had given up even words. And left the silence to speak.

Jamie began to have trouble with his breathing. He had a tire valve in his windpipe. The air came in, but it wouldn't go out. He walked around the room, clumping his heels. He got matches and lighted more candles. He brought up short and clapped his brow.

"Why, and there's your *husband*! We hadn't thought of *him*!"

"Ralph Cole, you mean?"

"He's coming, isn't he?"

"Is he?"

"But you sent for him."

"Did I? That's funny. What was I thinking? It doesn't make sense."

"But still—if he comes?"

"He's been dead a good many years, as far as I'm concerned. Could the blood of the dead do the dying much good?"

The tire valve blew up and all the air rushed out. "There's *me*! If you'd even *consider* it, God knows, all the blood I've got in *me* ——"

With something singularly like swiftness Sharon turned on her side. As if magicked out of nothing, her body (that had been nothing) made a thickness under the covers, and the thickness cast a shadow on the bed beyond.

"Jamie—would you?"

Through Heaven

"God knows! I'd be so—so utterly ——"

"Jamie—why?"

"*I want you to live!*"

"Why?"

"Wh-wh-what do you mean—why?"

There was something in her eyes that seemed to come through the candle light and fasten upon him.

"Tell me, Jamie. Do you want me to live because it's your job? Is it *doctor* that's wanting to give his life blood, Jamie? Or—tell me!"

There was the sound of a door opening and closing downstairs. Jamie rubbed a hand over his eyes. "There—there's Bromberg now."

"*Tell me!*"

One of those miracles had happened. Sharon, who couldn't sit up, was sitting up in bed, blood in her lips and roses on her cheeks.

He went forward. He felt like a ridiculous Mercury, wings as big as eagles' flapping at his heels. He got down and put his face against the overhang of a rumpled pillow and felt the touch of her hands on his hair.

Such things don't happen to country doctors twenty-nine years old.

"Tell me!" she was crooning, and now it wasn't her hands but her lips against his hair.

He mumbled it into the pillow that half choked him: "To the last drop, Sharon, Sharon. The last drop in my veins! The last drop in my heart!"

The Man Who Saw

"For always, Jamie? Will you love me forever and ever and ever?"

He got up, shivering. He went and opened the door and walked down the stairs as a man might walk down the Great Pyramid, every step yards deep.

David and Ralph Cole finished the flask after the two doctors, leaving the relieved and disappointed basket-baller to return to the car, had gone upstairs, red-faced, to have it out in Sharon's room. And having exhausted the rye, they had nothing to do again but wait.

"Wait, yes," Cole mused from the dark of the alcove, where he had taken to the day bed. "But wait for what?"

"When you've seen Sharon ——"

"That's what I mean, David. I don't believe I'm seeing Sharon this trip. Honestly, do you?"

David winced. There was no reason for his wincing, except that, in the past little while, he had begun to feel thin-skinned and queer. He had seen Jamie Butler's face when Jamie came down the Great Pyramid of the stairs. And after he had winced, and before he had thought, his mouth had fallen open.

"I wonder if *I'm* seeing her, *myself*."

He felt the overrush of sudden jealousy; no, it was bitterer than jealousy; it was a bitter, penetrative sense of shoddiness, of obsolescence and neglect. Yes, of a crinkled necktie and cracked shoes.

Through Heaven

He dug his hands into his pockets and walked across the room, and between two winks of time the room whose every inch was known had turned unknown. In the sickly shine of the one lamp he had lighted it was as strange as a room in the chancest house he might have broken into for hobo shelter; and the only thing familiar was the voice of his brother of the road.

"Only, whatever you do, Dave, don't get to thinking Sharon has anything to do with—with—what she does."

David stood and stared out of the window. The moon, nearly round, was half an hour high. Still touched by the humors of the horizon, it cast a thin and hybrid ray across the water, and it was water no waking eye had ever looked on, but viscid, like glass, at once cold and molten, and the thing that should have been an island far out swam the vitreous waves, come to life, amphibian. And David saw that it wasn't real and never had been, but only the back drop of a dream.

He returned into the room, rubbing his eyes open with reluctance and a kind of nostalgia, and stood harkening to the sounds of movement overhead. His eyes, left to their own devices, went and found the piano. He went and sat down on the stool.

It was a queer time to be sitting down at the piano, when for months he had hardly gone near it, and then grudgingly, on request and in shame.

The Man Who Saw

He oughtn't to play. Who knew what was happening to Sharon up there?

He just spread his fingers; that was all. They just touched the ivory steps, to rebound as weightless and aimless as feathers on the wind.

He hadn't meant it, but whispers began to ply among the wires of the hidden harp.

And suddenly the thing that had been jealousy and bitter loss turned its other face and winked and grinned and laughed aloud. Now, who the devil cared!

He shut his eyes and shook his shoulders, and even the shake itself broke down into a swaying, servant to the rhythm that came out of the strings through the keys to make fools of his fingers—to catch his fingers and hold them helpless on the chord an eighth and a sliver of another eighth of a note too long for sense, only to send them in harlequin rout to recover step with the march of mother ocean through the rock, still only to scatter them syncopating again.

Contagion ran through the room. Cole came padding from the alcove. He had never had much of a singing voice, and what he had he hadn't used for years. But the swing had caught him and turned him weird :

“I'm blue,
Blue!

Why I'm blue, it's me asks you ——

Through Heaven

"No, Dave! Wait! I've got it wrong. *Wait*, I tell you, and do it again."

"I know. I was balled up myself. All right—now!"

"I'm blue,
Bloo-oo-oo-oo-oo ——"

It was a gorgeous "hold." Bass viol and trombones!

"Harlem out of Kongo!" breathed Cole.

"Kongo nothing. That's done to death. Wait, listen to this. Ting-a-ling-a-ling—— Man' it's Pell Street! It's China! Glory, and China hasn't been ragged for years. There's *never* been a Chinese—never yet a '*Yellow Blues*.'"

"Dave! Hold on just a second. All right, I've got it. Go!

"Bloo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo-oo——
I'm a light, bright yellow—
China fellow yellow—
Ricy—spicy—lichee-nuttee—nicy—
Chin-chow—chop-suey blue."

David took his fingers up and ran them through his hair. "Cole," he asked in a small voice, "where did you ever hear that thing?"

"I never did, till now."

"Gosh! neither did I."

Their faces were funny shapes; their complexions queer.

"Cole! Can't you hear Al Jacobs singing it? In a pigtail, with grass slippers?"

"I can see him."

"Who is he?"

"It's funny, David, but I pretty blamed near know. Wait!" Cole sank down on an end of the bench and put his hands to his head. "Play me something more. Different. There! That's the man! Just the beginning:

"Cook to a captain of finance,
In his fine an-cestral home.

"David, man, can you see it now? All I wish is I couldn't see it so fast. It's coming through my head like a through freight making up for lost time. She has got it firmly into her head that the Chinese cook is a prince in disguise. And then the fun —— No, and the English butler is a king, incog. So you see, between them all, it follows ——"

Their voices rang, subdued and excited, in the shadowy chamber. Sometimes the piano came in, chittering, singing. The preoccupation of their eyes made them look crossed a little. Their faces were jeweled with sweat.

"Can you see it, Dave? Can you see it, man?"

"I can feel it, though, from my shoulders down to

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my fingers. It's funny; it's the first time I've felt anything in my fingers for years."

What had happened to Sharon? What had happened to the world? What had happened to time?

Dr. Bromberg stood and bellowed at them from the door.

"Is this a *crazy house*—or *what*?"

When they only blinked at him, two stupids who didn't know his time was worth three cents a second, he shook his fists and lapsed into Teutonisms. "Upstairs I am to be insulted—malingerers and idiots. Blood! I have to laugh. Transfusions! What a joke! I come here; my time is valuable; I am a specialist. I am not a nurse to spank idiotic children. When I tell that young whippersnapper he is a dunderhead and he tells me I am worse, it is not enough. When the woman tells me that I should one day be going to that same young whippersnapper to school, it is not enough. All the while I must have in my ears, under my feet, all around me, a cheap *spieling*. The presence of a physician is here to be respected by *jazz*!"

He stormed off. Cole looked at David and David looked at Cole. They felt a little dizzy, as though they had been falling a great distance, and a little dazed, as though they had lit. "Oh, yes," said Cole. He jumped up and called after Bromberg: "Wait a second, Doctor; give us a ride." He hustled David. "Dave, where's your hat?"

Then he didn't wait; he ran out himself and began to rummage the closet in the hallway. "I've got it," he called. He returned to meet David, grinning. "I've got the answer to why I was sent to come out here to-day. I was to tell you not to hurry and here's your hat."

In the car they crowded in with the doctor. Among other things with which they were filled, on this evening when the world commenced to go around again, was a divinity of impudence. They could sit anywhere.

In the train they sat on trunks in the baggage car. They had bought a harmonica with what was left of their pooled funds after taking their tickets. David held it cupped in urchin hands as he swayed on his trunk and watched the sparks blow past the open door and played with little melodies that had never been played with before. There's nothing like it in the world, or in the world to come—when you're born that way.

And so with Cole. Cracked shoes and empty pockets are bad when a fellow's going; when he's coming they're a lark.

"Said the prince
(Of the paupers of Peking)
To the king
(Of the cabbies of Kew ——"

Through Heaven

"Where's Kew, Ralph?"

"Where the cabbies are."

A clanging and banging silence fell between them. And by and by:

"I was just thinking about Sharon, Ralph. Funny thing, but—what's wrong about Sharon?"

"What's wrong with Sharon? Nothing, but just that she's between God and the devil."

"Ye-s?"

"You see, God made Sharon want to hitch her wagon to a star. But the devil gave her a taste for driving. But the one thing about stars is they won't be driven. Eagles, then. But eagles won't either. So at last they had to compromise on lame ducks." Another silence.

"About Sharon, Ralph. Funny thing, but honestly—I do hope she's going to be happy."

"So do I. I told you."

Peace on earth, good will toward men.

The rushing sparks made flowers. It was like the garden of the beginning of the world.

The flowers flew far. The Garden of the new Eden of to-night was blooming everywhere.

Jamie stood by Sharon's bed, his hand in hers, and stared out into it with eyes as big as the moon. He didn't know what to say. He couldn't say "Thank you"; people say "Thank you" for simply passing the bread. He couldn't say "I love you" any more; he'd

said it so many times. He could only hope she understood how incredibly incredible it all was.

"And besides Gottlieb at Rockefeller," she was saying, "I know Panne at Johns Hopkins; he'd do anything for me. And it won't be for me, either, sweetheart. I know—they've told me—there's always room for another hungry imagination, another devoted man."

The island out there on the silver sea was fairy stuff. It changed to a man, white-hooded, aproned, rubber-gloved, grave, devoted, giant size. It was a dream, but the thing about it that kept his eyes and took his breath away was that it was a dream that was coming true.

"Jamie."

"I love you, Sharon."

"You've forgotten me." Her hand tightened around his and began to pull. "Why do you look out *there* so long, my lover? *Look at me!*"

WHAT DO YOU MEAN—
AMERICANS?

XII

WHAT DO YOU MEAN — AMERICANS ?

THEY live in the country of the old—old houses, old sands, old men. Already they dream, and this is their dream, that when they are gone the tides, which seem to eat deeper into the Cove each year, will just come on up one spring and carry what's left of Cape Cod down under the water of the Seven Seas that in its old youth it conquered, its work and its glory done. And that will be before long now, for there are only a few folks left.

You can count the families on one hand. There are the Whites and the Fullers in the Hollow, the Rogerses at the Bog, the Brewster brothers at the Cove. That's about all now in this tenuous, half-drowned, seven-mile wrist of the Cape. Of the Whites and Rogerses there are four generations, in the Fuller house three: the latter ends run pretty puttering, though, and pretty thin.

If it's a far cry from the Edward Fuller who came ashore to say his prayers, chase Indians, and leave his name on the Pilgrim Tablet over in Provincetown, down to Eddie Fuller, yawning and attending to his pimples behind the post-office boxes at the Center—if

it's a far cry from those dreadless "subjects of the dread sovereign" down to the youthless White youths, flivver rattling to their fevered merrymakings at Wellfleet or Eastham, their galvanic dead-frog dancing, their drug-store tipple, and their radio jazz—if there's a gap there, there's a gap almost as wide and quite as melancholy between these tag ends of the stock and a generation still living under the roofs with them—Sam White and Benjie Fuller in the Hollow, Ember Rogers at the Bog, Andy and Isaiah Brewster at the Cove—men who fetched Kennebec ice cakes to Calcutta and brought new China tea up the Thames in the *Sea Glory* and the *A. J. Stowell* two weeks ahead of London's own East-Indiamen in the days that were days.

In those days the Cape bred women too. Look at Molly, Andy Brewster's wife, that's dead and gone. Then look at the Molly Brewster of to-day. She keeps house for her great-grandfather Andy and his brother Isaiah at the Cove, and what house she keeps! Well, it's not the way the other Molly did it sixty years ago. Bread baked in Boston, beans baked in Chicago, cake in cardboard from goodness-knows-where! She hasn't the time, she says.

Hasn't the time! Those two old men fathom the sad, deep, literal truth of that. She hasn't the time. She came too late, the sands too nearly run. After her the deluge; so why take pains? What's the use of forethought, with nothing to come? What's the use of character, never to be handed down? What's

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the use even of appearances? Studying her secretly from beneath their watery lids, they comprehend. That is why, then, she speaks a language of strange, daring, slipshod words; why her gestures are all immoderate and her songs out of tune; why she goes about unabashed in skirts as short and lips as red as a California harlot in the days of gold. That is why she is never at home evenings, darning or quilting under the sitting-room lamp, but off as soon as ever the supper dishes are stacked, with a pat and a fling and a mouth of rebellion, flitting the devil alone knows where in the dark of the country of the old.

“Let us eat, drink, and be merry——” Poor girl!

She hasn't the time even to care about the company she keeps. This strikes deepest into the hearts of Andy and Isaiah. Their pride is bitter. To think of these two blond vikings of the republic who carried the Stars and Stripes around a wondering world, who came home to fetch good, honest Indies rum ashore under the dark of the Cove like the free men they were, and went up to the meeting house in their Sabbath beavers to worship the God of Massachusetts as only free men may—to think of them having to sit, shackled to their rockers by the weight of their proud years, and watch the remnant of their line and population going, without visibly caring, to the dogs!

They would have called him a dog in their time, or at least “one of them niggers of some sort.”

He comes out of the deepening shadows. Whence he

comes, in that narrow land where there are only the Rogerses and Brewsters, the Fullers and the Whites, who can say? Andy and Isaiah can't. When they try, their minds close up.

Their minds do that of late years. More and more easily. When, at the ice-cream feast of the Dorcases last Autumn, the two old fellows undertook in mournful gaiety to twit the schoolma'am upon the dwindling of her flock, and when she looked puzzled (for all the world) and told them that, land alive! they weren't to worry, she had her hands full, and would have them a sight fuller, she guessed, before they got around to putting in the new primary room—when she said that, Isaiah looked at Andy and Andy at Isaiah, one winked and the other cackled, and their minds, like wary clam shells, closed up tight. "Primary room!" They weren't to be taken in by jokes like that. They were too smart.

He comes out of the deepening shadows, his approach heralded, long before he is seen, by the sounding boards of the hills that gather down to the Cove, the clank of a loose brake beam, the whine of gritted springs, gaskets wheezing. A curious centaur, head and shoulders and busy arms of a man, body of an ungroomed half-ton truck; so from their rockers on the porch behind the mosquito-netting they always see him, Jimmy the Greek. So he careens to a halt under the antique, uneasy willows in the blue-brown shadow

Through Heaven

cast by Sheep Hill; so he snorts, backs, swerves, carriages, pawing the sand, gamboling in the twilight of these Yankee gods; so he rears there, breathing heavily with his pitted cylinders, peering glassily with his one large rectangular eye at the house beyond the turf, the house native and noble, solid and broad and low, with a roof like another slope of the gray Pamet moors. So, unbudging from his hybrid shell, he calls through the dusk: "Molly to home?"

Neither Andy nor Isaiah answers. Rock, rock, rock, their chairs and their dry bones creaking, their eyes meeting, full of repugnance, rebellion, appeal. They'd have their tongues cut out before they'd speak.

No need. Molly has answered herself: "Yep, just a second I'll be with yu, Jim, old kid."

She passes out between the rockers, hatless, free of elbow, wanton of stocking, neither mother of to-morrow nor daughter of yesterday.

"Where you bound for, Molly?" Andy writhes. He feels degraded.

"Where you bound?" Isaiah writhes. He too had sworn never to ask again.

"Oh, nowheres. Up to the dance at Chatham, that's all. Oh, for the love, Jimmy, can that honking, will yu! I'm on my way! Now, Daddies, run, climb in your beds like good boys. Sound sleep, sweet dreams!"

Sleep! Dreams! The mockery!

Their rockers are still. Leaning forward, squeezing the chair arms with their vein-corded fists, they follow

the iron flight of the centaur, cast back in fainter and fainter reverberations from the folded moor sides, careening farther away, deeper away in the mists of the falling night.

He's going up Graveyard Hill now. If only their legs could run as swiftly as their minds. He's abreast of the old Snow place now. Thrrmmm! Whine and wheeze! An abominable whisper threading the valleys. It's louder for an instant, as though a door in the hills had opened. He's crossing the marsh at the Center now, this what-is-he? This Greek. This what's-his-name? J. Krenk, General Trucking. Jimmy the Greek. And Molly Brewster!

Anger, reckless and helpless, sweeps them.

Let him take her. Let him take her back to his lemon-peddling, olive-stinking, two-for-a-nickel Levant ports. Then let her see!

Then let her think of those white women, the other Mollys, her mothers!

Memories submerge the two men; their tantrum passes and gives place to nostalgia; they turn cowards, feeling themselves abandoned, defeated at last. The mosquito bar is a cage, oppressing their lungs and bringing to their skins a faint, chill sweat. Moved by a common impulse, they get up and rush out. They have forgotten their hats, and Isaiah's head is as bald as a porpoise. What matter? Their rheumatics! Their hearts! What odds!

Where are they going, hoisting their feet so indus-

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triously along the clam-shell metal of this road? Where and why?

"We might drop around and see Sam White a minute, the night's so fine."

"So we might. I hear tell he was ailin' a trifle yesterday."

Two shafts of light, streaming from nowhere, wheel across the dark. Two orbs, sudden and blinding, fetch up with a snort to eye the vivid old men.

"Here they are now," comes a voice out of the creature.

"Why," gasps Andy, "if 'tain't the White boys!" Isaiah, blinking into the headlights, lifts a reedy voice: "We was bound over your way, boys."

"Well, ma said we should stop by and tell you, and save you the trip. It'll be Friday at two, the fun'ral."

The monster squats there on its rubber haunches, purring, reading their stupid faces. After a little it says: "You'd heard about gran'pa, hadn't you? Went last evenin', quiet, no pain. And it's Friday at two." Presently it gives them over for dumb ones, bounces around in the road and streams off up the vale, leaving their eyes full of stars.

"Sam!" says one.

"Sam!" says the other. That's all.

Perhaps it's the way it happened, the stage effects; perhaps it's something long predestined in the calendar of their years. No matter, the night has turned a corner and become apocalyptic.

Sam White is gone.

In silence they plod back. They plod back toward the cage of the netting, the eighty-year prison of the dark house. Sleep. Dreams.

But, no-sir! Not by a dang sight, they won't! They bolt the road and flee it at right angles across the tricky footing of the poverty-grass.

"They seek water, and die in the open." That's rats.

But why all this? They knew Sam had to go sooner or later and give over his much of room to the returning wilderness and the climbing tides. Just as they know that Benjie and Ember will have to give over theirs, and they themselves, and let the tired Cape go down. Didn't they know that?

They're silly, but you can't argue it. It's something in this night, something let loose, something that pursues and climbs up their legs like a travesty of strength, another childhood. So they clamber for all they're worth, in silence, their mouths open, as if it were true that the valley behind was filling up with the flood.

They look back when they reach the crest of Sheep Hill, and from the height they see the country familiar to them, rod by rod of its folded moors, its dunes and winding marshes, spread of a sudden fantastic and pixy-peopled under this night. Will-o'-the-wisps and ghost-fires.

There's John Champion's house, under the shoulder

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of Finback, a mile to the east. John died a good twenty years ago, and his daughter's family moved to Iowa. Yet there looks to be a light in it, a goblin cheer. Dave Burch passed on in the nineties; his children live in Los Angeles; the homestead, hidden under the cottonwoods in the Flat, opens an eye in distant banshee mockery. And there again. As if there were people, populations! And there again. Like a lamp on Borneo Plain!

There's one element that never betrays, but always plays fair. If the land is playing tricks with your eyes, old fellows, turn them to the sea.

Across the water the sky toward Boston shows a late loom of dusk, doubled upside down in the mirroring plain. Not far offshore, across the mouth of the Cove, a fisherman sails, his dim masts erect in the meager breeze. Farther distant, toward the lights on Provincetown shore, a monster lies at rest on the sea.

So the sea too is corruptible to-night, even the sea. It abides Leviathan. Leviathan blowing a leaden, lazy spout; prodigious creature, ink-black, and incandescent-striped.

"She come in weeth engine trouble," says a voice.

There's another watcher on Sheep Hill. He arises from a beach-plum bush at their feet, headless, because he has his coat shawlwise over his head.

"I never seen her beefore, thees ship, and that's funny because my boy goes een her. and she's lak a

city, he says. Fifty-nine t'ousand ton! What you know about that?"

What, indeed, do they know about that? Except that the night is trying to play them another trick. Painting that shadow on the shadows out there, enormous; as though a master and a mate of an incomparable *Sea Glory* were to be taken in by a jest as thin as that, a ship enormous as eighty *Sea Glories* on one keel!

"I tell you," says the shade, "these Englishmann, these Germann, they got notneeng on us now. One day us Americans we weel be as beeg a shipping nation as they is on the sea; you watch."

It's too rare. Andy and Isaiah open their mouths to chuckle, and before they can chuckle, a hot, contemptuous anger has got in their throats instead.

"Who are *you*?" they cry, and "Where you from?" Those voices that rang, full-winded, absolute, over the decks of the white clippers of the years when the world rubbed its eyes. Echoes now.

Echoes, yes, but echoes still puissant. The headless Jack-in-the-box sounds fetched aback and ill at ease.

"Wh-wh-who am I? Well, I guess you know me, Meester Brewster. You know Manuel Braganza. You seen me round plentee, I guess. Since five year I got thees old Champion place back here, crost from Jimmee the Greek. I guess you know *me*, all right."

"Nope."

"You don't know Manuel Brag—don't know Manny the Lisbon?"

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"Never hear the name. Never!"

"You—you—never hear o' my boy Johnnee?"

"Johnnie who?"

Silence. That has done for him. It has done for them too; done wonders. Their feet are solid on their own hill again and they begin to tower. Men against bogies, men will win every time.

It's true. The spook hasn't a word. Presently he begins to fade before their eyes, a receding whisper of sand. Across the hilltop and down the slope the long, black, dismembered torso vanishes degree by degree into the dark above the invisible Cove.

Give these old fellows an inch and they'll take a mile. The impulse to pursue, to rout him sevenfold, to crow, to pile it on, is too strong. Nor is it altogether this that hauls them to the sandy precipice where he disappeared. Triumph has given sudden rein to memories; their feet are in old paths; their tongues wag.

"Remember that night the revenue man come snoopin'?"

"Remember the skiff bottom-up on the beach with the three bar'ls of rum under it, and me under it with 'em and my legs caught out by the gun'l, full in view?"

"Rec'lect the brig hove to out there, 'bout where that fisherman lays now?"

"The *Abraham*, wa'n't it? And Ezra Small?"

They pause. Pause? Where are they? What in

the name of Jehoshaphat are they doing here, old flies, clinging midway of the precipitous sand? This much is certain: if they don't catch their death one way they'll catch it another.

They pause. Hunkering down in little sand slides, they gaze at the becalmed schooner. In the cobweb starlight it might truly be the *Abraham*, and Captain Ezra prowling the deck and chewing his whisker and wondering what's wrong with the Brewster boys ashore. They gaze at the pool of the inlet below them, and there the starlight, chasing the ripples, weaves silver stuff of dreams, mesmeric, fluent. The gods are young.

"Rec'lect that night, eh?"

"Remember Molly ——"

Molly! A subconscious discord. A rift of syncopation, dilute, galvanic; a painted mouth, an empty head; a half-ton truck, a Greek.

No, though! By thunder, no! *Molly*, they're talking of *Molly*!

She was the wife of one, the sister in-law of the other. Years have almost outlawed that inequality. To each she comes back all comeliness, all docile bravery, all grace. A woman of those days.

"Remember Molly that night, Isaiah? You couldn't see her, though, and you stuck under the skiff; the way she come trippin' down from nowheres, fetch one look at your boots croppin' out like a hamstrung turtle, set down on the skiff, tidied her skirts out over, and set

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there gazing at the stars as soberlike as if she was in the habit of stargazin' every night with a shotgun laid across her lap. Nor you couldn't see the way old Revenue Perkins eyed her and hesitated, scrawn out his neck and fetch to a halt."

"I heard him, though, Andy; promise you that. 'Pleasant evenin', Mis' Brewster!' 'Pleasant evenin', Mr. Perkins!' 'I'm aimin' to have a look in under that skiff, if you don't mind, Mis' Brewster?' 'In which case, Mr. Perkins, you're aimin' to do something you ain't able; not so long's I'm settin' on to it.' 'In which case, Mis' Brewster, I shall have the law on to the lot of you——' 'In which case, Mr. Perkins, I'll have something a sight quicker actin' than the law on to *you*, sir.' (With that I hear the gun butt easin' up along the garboard strake.) 'Quit it, Molly Brewster!' says Perkins. 'Git, Eben Perkins,' says Molly, 'and git quick!'"

"And Revenue gat! I *guess* he gat!"

"Never hear the last of it, did he? Nor come snoopin' *this* way again, eh?"

"Feared o' meetin' up with Molly! Heh-heh!"

"The gentlest and abidin'est of women! Heh-heh-heh!"

The gentlest, the abidingest of women! What homage could be more precious to the heroine of long ago than this cachinnation of old men, this mirth flung out in thready challenge to reconquering nothingness and the prowling powers of the dark?

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The dark answers, coagulating in another shade at their feet, downhill.

"What you doin' here, you guys?"

Their mouths dry and fall agape.

"Well, I v-v-vow!" bleats Isaiah, and Andy echoes him: "I vow!"

"Oh," breathes the shade, "I know now. It's old Isaiah and old Andy."

"But who in—in—are *you*?"

"Don't you rec'nize me? It's Tony Fuller from the Coast Guard. You know me."

"*Tony!*" They see their chance. "*Tony Fuller!*" The impostor is delivered into their hands. Their voices break high. "There wa'n't never a man—there's been Eds and Ezras, Johns and Jonathans—but never a man amongst the Fullers called by any such nigger name, such a lemon-peddlin' name, as '*Tony*.' No-sir-ee!"

The haunt chuckles, rubbing his lips with a spectral sleeve.

"Try Farquiera then; that's my family's name when they come from the Azores. Or if you're bent on crackin' your jaws, try 'em on this guy Sob-lef-sky—Sub-lof-sky—whatever 'tis. He's down in the road there to the left, waitin'; so you get along now, quiet, and tell him I sent you, and he'll leave you through. Skedaddle, my boys; clear out o' here!"

If there is one there are a dozen retorts, just at their scandalized lips; arrogant laughter, withering old

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quarter deck oaths. Dumbly, though, sending down a whispering lace of sand, like autumnal spiders, they flee as they are told, not knowing why. They get off the cliff, their own cliff, not knowing how; a lichenous ground is underfoot, then a streak half clay, then ruts. A wind, a slow draft redolent of clam and weed, bears them along; an air familiar as the years of their youth, turned secret and queer. It bears them into the mouth of a hollow floored with blackness and roofed with stars. Sergeant Belkar Soblievski of the State Police snaps on the headlight of his motor cycle and examines them with his yellow cornucopia of flame.

"You're out late, my friends." Then, not meaning the light-blistered couple to stand there all night, he says in a kindlier tone: "Go right on, the way you were going, my fathers, and keep your mouths shut, and no harm done. Good night."

It is some moments before he snaps off the snooping light. Behind Isaiah and Andy, across the wheel track to the Eden of their ancestral Cove, the ray hangs horizontal, like a lazy angel's flaming sword.

Here come the willows out of the hill. There's a moon somewhere under the eastern ocean, and its foreglow, refracting from the zenith, describes with faint silver the slopes of the roof, the two fat chimneys, the fence.

So it's home they're coming after all.

Their boots drag; soul and body they're beat, the pair of them, dead beat.

The house opens and swallows them. No need of a lamp; they can find their beds in the dark. Mind the table, Isaiah. Take care of that swayed door; it's got to be fixed, no two ways. Here's the chair for Andy, and here's the chair for Isaiah, to drape their coats and trousers over, their shirts and drawers.

There's nothing left but sleep, then. Sound sleep. Sweet dreams.

Isaiah, the youngster of the two, lies on his back, toes up, wide awake. Andy, across the room, lies toes up too, counting sheep. One sheep over the fence; two sheep over the fence; three sheep over the fence. There's a nigger-looking fellow herding them. Land! he's got no head. Manny the Lisbon! That's a dirty port, Lisbon. And he had the gall to say—this headless Portugee Eyetalian fly-by-night——

What's that? There! Again! Passing like spirit footfalls across the turf outside!

The hall clock is still—still these years—but Molly's alarm clock sends in a tinny cheeping from the kitchen. Where can Molly be?

Five sheep over the fence; six sheep over the——

What's that? "Andy!"

"Yes, Isaiah?"

Isaiah slides out of bed, tiptoes across the chamber, creeps in beside his elder brother. Neither of them says anything. It's nearly seventy years since Isaiah did that. But neither of them speaks.

They're not used to lying awake. It's this night.

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This night of supernal license, weird air quakes, invasions crepuscular and fleeing of little peoples from beyond the pale.

Seven sheep over the fence ——

“What’s wrong, boy?”

“I hear a mosquito in the room, dang him, and I can’t sleep.”

“Pshaw, Isaiah, now you turn over and shut your eyes and——” Andy sits bolt up, a listener. “Hark!”

Thud! A fault in the atmosphere, small, echoless. A gunshot, unmistakable. Thud! Thud! Thud! An imponderable fusillade.

Is it ghosts, in this land of the dead? Memories? All inside the brain?

Andy tries Isaiah: “Isaiah, did you hear anything?”

The youngster lies there with the quilt tight over his chest. It’s a terrible thing, when you’ve been equal to anything and everything, to find yourself suddenly like this. His voice comes as thin as eel grass:

“Where’s that girl?”

It’s too much for Andy, and he joins in: “Why don’t she ever come home? What’s she thinkin’ on, this hour of the night?”

“‘Tain’t decent, Andy. What’ll folks say?”

“What does she care for that?”

“What does she care if she keeps us wakin’ for her?”

“Who are *we*, anyhow? What do *we* ’mount to?”

“What does anything ’mount to these days; any-

thing but cavortin' about with foreigners, dancin', huggin' maybe, carryin' on, forgettin' your religion, your elders, your upbringing—anything to make the time go quick?"

"And devil take the hindmost!"

There's a cry, chambered in distance. The devil taking the hindmost, perhaps. The empty moors and dunes where men used to live give it out; one lone articulation, anger, terror, mortal pain, who can tell from the spent whisper creeping in through the Brewster blinds?

"A-n-d-y, I wish—I wish that girl was to home."

"I—I wish she was."

The shame of it, confessed at last, mutually, out loud! Isaiah Brewster, who in the name of the Great Republic stood up on his feet and told the portbashaw of the Emperor of Siam to go to Jericho! Andy Brewster, who with his own hands put half his crew in irons at the height of the Seventy-one Typhoon! The two of them now, praying nothing but the sound of Molly's dance shoes on the floor beyond the wall; the comfort of even Molly's doomsday youthfulness under the roof with them!

Prayers aren't half-ton trucks, though, for beggars to ride.

Or are they? Wait!

Isaiah is up now, sitting as bolt and gray as Andy.

Another mosquito? No. Hardly louder than a mosquito, to be sure, and oddly like the insect's silky

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whine— that whine of springs and beams and gaskets, all in one, a mile away.

“’Tis him!”

“’Tis! ’Tis!”

“He’s to the marsh now—or—or no——”

“N-n-no——no—— Isaiah!”

“You mean it don’t sound like ’twas on ——”

“’*Tain’t* on. ’*Tain’t* on any road I know of, Isaiah. That’s clear to the north’rd somewheres. Sounds to me ——”

“Sounds to me like it was all adrift somewheres up Borneo Plain ——”

Thud! The shadow of the fantom of a shot! That’s gone. So is the whine, like the whir of a nighthawk planing back into the night again.

“Isaiah,” says Andy, “you lay down and go to sleep. This is foolishness.”

Five minutes, up they knife again.

A step. A clandestine sole on the porch. A sneaking tread.

Andy wouldn’t speak for a million dollars; neither would Isaiah.

“Molly!” they call in the same breath.

No answer. Only the scratch of a match, out the kitchen way.

“Molly Brewster!”

The match goes out. More footfalls. Odd footfalls. Odd chills.

Who? What?

The second match is at the very foot of their bed, a blinding nimbus. In the nimbus there are two eyes, a lean, green-brown face, a hat like an inverted flower pot made of kinky wool.

"You gaht ahny rags, say?"

When Isaiah was mate in the Boston fruit-bark *Hope Wade* he used once a year to load figs at Smyrna. He used to sit in an armchair on the house within one spit of the rail and keep those natives going as only a Cape man could, with alternate volleys of truculence and wit. "If there's one thing I'd love to see before I die," he used to say, "it's one of you lazy heathen Turk-fellahs tryin' to earn a meal in the town of Pam-et, Barnstable County, Mass. If there's one thing I'd love!"

It comes back to Isaiah, every fatal syllable. The white rims widen around his eyes. He begins to speak.

"You're that Turk ——"

"Curse the Toork! He kelled my fahther, my mahther, my brahther!"

"No-sir, though, no-sir, all foolin', you're the one—the one folks c-c-calls the Turk—that comes by sellin' carpets. You are so!"

A frown withers the green-brown face.

"You gaht ahny rags, say? You gaht ahny rags?"

The match burns a finger and sails away in two red stars, blown by an Asian oath. In reverse the

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business of footfalls reënacted, across the kitchen, across the porch.

The night has overreached itself. "Got any rags?" That's a joke.

There's a glimmer of moon through the cracks in the blinds. In the wraith of light Andy lifts on an elbow and studies supine Isaiah. The youngster lies with his head cracked back, as though by a blow, his mouth open, the shape of a black egg, and his whisker thrust straight up in the air. He's not dead, though; he's asleep.

Andy lies back and summons all his resolution. Resolutely he envisions sheep, just such sheep as Dave Burch used to run on Borneo Plain, matted gray-brown bodies and slender legs snapping under them. Over the stone wall they go. One sheep over; two sheep over; three sheep over; four—or was it five?—five—six sheep——

When he awakens it is with a gulp and a kick.

Who's that? By the bed there, towering in the new gray?

It's Isaiah. It's the youngster, getting his pants on.

"I can't stand it," says Isaiah, his teeth aclatter.

"What is it *now*?"

"I don't know. My Godfrey, if I *knowed*, I—there! Hark to that!"

"That trompin' like?"

"Trompin', yes. Trompin', skitterin', skutterin' all

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about, whisperin' too, and groanin' into the bargain. There now! Will y' hark?"

"In the wood house. Or more like Molly's room. Mebby it's Molly."

"I want to know."

"Or cats."

"I want to know."

Andy fumbles his pale legs out of the quilt and into his trousers. They go in stocking feet, carrying their boots. In the kitchen Andy pauses.

"Molly come home?"

"Never hear her."

"You been asleep, though."

"I ain't. Not one blessed wink, and that's true. No-sir, everything I seen, I seen. There's niggers and heathen and all manner of islanders and dagoes spiritin' about, this night. Andy, there was a Turk come into our room, and I seen him with my own two eyes. So I ain't been asleep."

"I'll look in her room, anyway, on the chance."

Holding his breath, he edges open Molly's door. His head disappears. It reappears, the cheeks collapsing with relief.

"By glory, she *be*. Here all this time, to bed, asleep. Us fools!"

Side by side, holding the door open, they gaze into the little chamber, cave-lit with the seepage of dawn, perfumed with violet water, tar soap, carnation powder, fiber-silk stockings, and all the faint, mingled em-

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anations from frocks and underthings—the rectangular gray whiteness of the bed—the dark spot of a head averted on the pillow.

“Don’t wake ’er.”

“No; easy’s the word; take care.”

The old fools!

“Molly!” breathes Andy, just once. Just to try.

The head on the pillow flops over. The heads in the door thrust out.

Black eyes study them from the pillow, hypnotized.

Jimmy the Greek!

If he is hypnotized, what are they?

It was in this room, in that bed, that Molly White Brewster died, on Cleveland’s election day. It was through that window her soul went to heaven.

They can do nothing but stare; stare at the bureau, holy of holies, untidy, intimate; a pot of cold cream, a ribbon, a note, a garter, a kitten of combings, a man’s plaid cap; stare at the bed, the pillow, the solitary presence there, obscurely begotten, horde-born, Mediterranean.

They open their mouths to roar like lions; in the hush they bleat.

“Where’s M-M-Molly?”

He holds them with black-and-white eyes; he has lost his tongue.

“Wh-wh-wh-where’s *Molly*?”

It’s Molly that answers, Molly’s feet askip on the

porch behind them, the wind of her coming across the kitchen, the fling of her arms brushing them aside like wraiths.

Worse than wraiths! Of a sudden something beyond accounting happens. In Molly's bedroom they've always kept the old paper, spotty and faded as it is; funny old paper, peopled by Venetian boatmen and early Victorian trees. And now between two breaths Andy and Isaiah are pictures with the boatmen and memories with the trees. It is as though still visible, no one saw them; as though reality had abandoned them and gone out into the middle of the room.

Molly is real; they're not. Tag end of a race and a tradition, her docked hair tousled, her shoes streaked with mud from another county, hem of a torn petticoat at the trail, she's flesh alive; a tradition and a race beginning.

She's on the bed's edge, hip and elbow, one wild hand in Jimmy Krenk's black curls, combwise, questioning, and her breath against his cheek.

"Y'all right, kid? Tell me quicker'n quick: y'all right?"

"Are *you* all right, Moll; you tell *me*?"

"You should worry about me! Do I look sick?"

"But, Moll ——"

"Shush, kid, I know. I look like a homemade hang-over, I know I do, but you got to consider a hundred 'n' thirty miles in that bus of yours is no *thé dansant* for a fair young thing, is it now? 'Specially the last fif-

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teen of 'em on a rim. Cheer up; I'll look good when I get a shot of coffee in me. And don't worry about the stuff; I got it all safe and dark to you-know-who, you-know-where, thirty-one cases, check, and you couldn't have made it snappier yourself, you poor angel, and that's that. And the bus is back in Costa's g'rage with the old plates on—and the clutch afloat—and that phony rear shoe gone to hell and that's that. And that motor-cycle egg was into Yarmouth Hospital at three, I just got word at the marsh, with his right arm out of commish. And that's that."

"Was it you, Moll? Was it you plugged the guy, same's Turkey says?"

"Well, if I didn't, there's been some awful mistake. I picked up your gun when you dropped it, and I was peeved. But say, don't get me talkin' ——"

"Listen, Moll, tell me somethin'. Was it you carried me up here from the Cove, same's Turkey says?"

"Well, Turkey helped some—as quick as he ——"

"Where was the other guys?"

"Busy, don't you forget. Who'd you s'pose got the cop crowd trailed off down Truro way? Jazzy work for a while. But now, Jim, how's the bean?"

"Bean's bright."

It's the strangest sensation, being a Venetian boatman inked on moldy wall paper, harkening to unintelligible tongues.

"And the leg?"

"Absitively perfect limb."

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"Turkey get it bandaged right? That petticoat of mine I slammed on ——"

"Coold not find ahny rahgs."

Reality spreads with the growing dawn. It's the Armenian himself, down on his hams on the carpet beyond the bed.

"No rags? Turkey, you're a bird! But listen—my God! You mean to say that plugged leg is still —— Oh, you poor lamb! Now, listen, Jim; I'll go as easy as easy, but I got to give it a look."

The painted boatmen close their painted eyes. Their painted ears they can not close. Earth swarms. Their painted minds they can not get quite shut. Murmurs. Fragments. The land of the old, the turncoat, teems with pitiless voices of the young. Rumors creep in through the windows.

"Doc and the priest ought to be coming ——"

"——No, Gabriel phoned the priest he needn't come. Jim's all right."

"He'll be all right, that is, if we can keep him doggo for a spell ——"

"——But what they'll say up-Cape when he don't show up at short-stop for the Legion in the Barnstable game next Sunday ——"

"Oh, we can bull through it somehow —— Hey, what's that?"

Another kind of a murmur; a high, faint throbbing in the air.

"Molly! Inside there! Here comes Doc Bader

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from Provincetown. I guess it's him, anyway; it sounds like Gaspa's seaplane. I'll slide up to the pond and show him the way."

Still another note, within the room, this one, half crooning:

"Good kid, did I hurt? Oh, good kid, I tried to be so gentle——"

"Gentle, Moll? Don't talk. You're the gentlest ever; and you're more'n the gentlest; you're the beautifullest, and you're more'n the beautifullest; you're the straightest, bravest——"

"Bravest! Quit kiddin', you Greek idiot. I been frightened sober; I'm still scared weak. Take hold of me and hang onto me tight, tight."

"I got yu, tight. All there is, though, I hate to be a bother here."

"Bother! That's a good line. It's my house, isn't it, Jimmy dearie? And seeing we're going to get married Friday, where's the diff?"

(Friday at two!)

The Venetian boatmen end their fading by fading quite away, out of the bedroom, out of the house.

It's a fog-dawn, the light from the sun-tipped hills coming down at every angle through the pearly smother. It's as if the night, in place of ending, had just bleached out. Albino darkness. White shades. The veil is troubled by them, half-glimpsed and gone; white shades of youth, black-eyed and swarthy, sallow and gray-eyed.

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Once more Andy and Isaiah flee the canopy of the willows and puff up Sheep Hill. The mist dilutes; at the height they find the sun and air. And the sea, Leviathan gone. The honest sea.

They flop on a timber and gaze at it. By and by Isaiah points a finger at the wedge of the Cove, still in the shadow below them.

"By cricky, she goes fast these days, Andy." He is resolved to see it, and he sees it; the marsh growing an estuary, the estuary a strait, a worm of blue salt water eating ever and ever more hungrily into the entrails of the dead Cape. "By cricky, 'twon't be many years till you can sail a vessel straight through the Hollow to the back side."

"Where do you get that stuff?" inquires a voice from behind the brothers. They won't have it. They won't hear.

"'Twa'n't so many years ago," says Andy in resolute musing, "there was beach plums growin' out there where them breakers are now."

"The hell there was!" A shadow falls across them, and out over their heads, blue and amber, floats the cloud of a cigaret. It's Frankie Silvado, the surfman from Pamet Station, and he has a purple mustache and dark, live, ardent eyes. He might have yellow eyes and green whiskers for all Andy and Isaiah: they won't see him and they don't see him.

Andy clears an indomitable throat: "Accordin' to my calc'lations, Isaiah, the way she's sinkin' now——"

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"That's a lovely pipe, that is," persists the tactless shade. "I been patrollin' this shore ten years and more, and I used to have to walk on the cliff because the tide was all over where them grass flats is now. You old geezers ain't up with the times, or you'd know all this land is makin' all the while. There was a pr'fessor lectured to Provincetown last Summer, and he says, like's not, it'll be all dry ground from here clean to Plymouth shore one day, with woods, like's not, and farms, and cities ——"

Cities! The brothers are betrayed. From one to the other passes a sage and soundless guffaw.

"Though," adds Silvado, "I don't know what kind o' people there'll be to live in 'em, the way things are goin' now with this Cape crowd, gettin' to be smugglers—runnin' in liquor off these West Indie vessels for all they're worth—women as bad as the men, too, accordin' to what Tony Fuller says he seen last night. I tell you the truth, I don't know what this country of ourn is comin' to."

By and by Andy turns an eye on Isaiah, and once more, with dogmatic patience, clears his throat.

"As I was sayin'—the way she's sinkin' now—and the way they're droppin' off—Sam yesterday—like's not you or me to-morrow—'twon't be so long now before there won't be any left hereabouts."

"Any what?"

Curse and double curse that Ginny! Like drops of water on the skull it grows suddenly too much.

"Any folks!" cried Isaiah.

"Any folks?"

Now they upend on their reedy legs and face him and lash out at him.

"Any—any—*Americans!*"

In the white pouring of the sunshine, as they watch greedily the effect of that brutal blow, the red mottles go out of their cheeks. Now, at last, they are terrified. This fellow doesn't even know what they're driving at.

"What do you mean?" he puzzles. "What do you mean—*Americans?*"



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